

The Market for Farm Labour in Scotland, 1900-1939

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I confirm that this thesis is entirely my own work and has been composed by me.

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Abstract

The thesis outlines the major developments in the market for regular farm labour in lowland Scotland during the period 1900-1939. It offers a much needed contribution to the historiography of Scotland, where there is little secondary literature on twentieth-century rural Lowland history. In addition, it takes up many of the issues discussed by recent rural social historians, and incorporates a number of previously unused economic and sociological theories into historical analysis.

The thesis can be split into two sections. The first section (chapters 2-4) looks at broad developments throughout lowland Scotland. Chapter two outlines the general economic history of Scottish farming, including land use, output, prices and government policy. Chapter three examines the position of regular farm labour, describing the patterns of employment and wages, and focusing on the changes that occurred in the macroeconomic balance of the labour market. It concludes that the depression of the 1930s was critical in transforming conditions which had remained in place since the early nineteenth century. Chapter four then proceeds to discuss the role of various institutions in the light of the patterns outlined in chapters two and three, concentrating on the Board/Department of Agriculture for Scotland, the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, and the Scottish Farm Servants' Union. The major areas where institutional intervention occurred are identified as being, collective bargaining and wage regulation, health and unemployment insurance, and housing.

The second section of the thesis (chapters 5-8) analyses patterns of behaviour at the microeconomic level within the locality. Two counties (Dumfriesshire and East Lothian) were selected to provide information for comparative local case studies. Chapter six examines the nature of recruitment and contractual arrangements with reference to the economic theories of job search and implicit contracts. Chapter seven looks at patterns of worker mobility within the industry; the two chapters identifying the efficient flow of information as a vital factor in labour market operations. This is complemented by a study of employment relations in chapter eight, drawing heavily on the work of the sociologist Newby. It refutes the hypothesis that relations were governed by deference or hostility, both farmer and worker maintaining a mutual respect for each other's position.

The thesis ends by concluding that, while major changes were experienced in the operation of the Scottish agricultural labour market at the macroeconomic level, these changes were not deep or sustained enough to have a major impact on the microeconomic behaviour of, or social relations between, employer and employee.

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Contents

Abbreviations

1. Introduction	1
2. The agricultural history of Scotland, 1900-1939	18
3. The Scottish agricultural labour market	75
4. The role of institutions	137
5. Local case studies	198
6. The rules of the game: reputations, recruitment and contracts	209
7. The unambiguous mobility of farm servants	244
8. Workers and farmers: a study in social relations	273
9. Conclusion	314
Appendices	324
Bibliography	329

Abbreviations

AEC	Agricultural Executive Committee
BAF	Board of Agriculture and Fisheries
BOAS	Board of Agriculture for Scotland
CPA	Corn Production Act, 1917
DAWC	District Agricultural Wages Committee
DOAS	Department of Agriculture for Scotland
DWC	District Wages Committee
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
NFU	National Farmers' Union (England and Wales)
NFUS	National Farmers' Union of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
P.P.	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office
SAWB	Scottish Agricultural Wages Board
SAWC	Scottish Agricultural Wages Committee
SCA	Scottish Chamber of Agriculture
SFSU	Scottish Farm Servants' Union
SRO	Scottish Record Office
SRWS	Scottish Rural Workers' Approved Society
UISC	Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee

Agricultural statistics

This refers to the annual agricultural statistics for Scotland which were published in a number of sources:

- a) *Agricultural returns for Great Britain, 1900-1911* (P.P.1901-1912/3)
- b) *Agricultural statistics, Scotland, I, 1912 - IX, 1920* (P.P.1913-1921)
- c) B/DOAS, *Agricultural statistics, X-XXVII, 1921-1938* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1923-1940) and *Agricultural statistics, Scotland, 1939 to 1944* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1948)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Twentieth century Scottish rural history

It is more than a decade since Ian Carter launched a furious attack on the historiography of rural Scotland. The central issue that he posed was that previous historians had taken the most advanced capitalist areas in the Scottish Lowlands (the Lothians and Berwickshire) and projected the resulting model of development onto the rest of the country¹. Since his book was published, much has been done to expand the analysis of the complexity of Scottish rural economic and social history, especially with reference to the nineteenth century, the period on which Carter concentrated his work. In particular, Devine and Campbell have further developed an understanding of the rich, regional diversity of the Scottish lowlands².

Yet, modern Scottish rural history is dominated by the Highlands. As Smout concluded: 'Writing on the social history of the Scottish countryside has been very unequally divided between the Highlands and the Lowlands....The Highlands have attracted a wealth of excellent writing.'³ Scottish academic study remains obsessed with the problems of Highland development, particularly the past and present existence of the crofting system⁴.

When seeking the history of rural lowland Scotland during the twentieth century, one discovers a hiatus. The present secondary literature is either very dated or very specific. For example the only available study of Scottish agricultural history was produced in the 1950s, a very general analysis

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), pp.178-181.

² Devine, T.M. (ed.), *Farm servants and labour in Lowland Scotland, 1770-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1984); Campbell, R.H and Devine, T.M., 'The rural experience' in Fraser, W.H.Fraser and R.J.Morris (eds.), *People and society in Scotland, II, 1830-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1990), pp.46-72; Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers: changes in rural society in south-west Scotland before 1914* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1991).

³ Smout, T.C., *A century of the Scottish people, 1830-1950* (Collins, London, 1986), p.282; see Campbell, R.H., 'Scottish economic and social history: past developments and future prospects' *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 10 (1990), p.16 for similar comments.

⁴ On crofting, see Hunter, J., *The making of the crofting community* (John Donald Edinburgh, 1976) and *The claim of crofting: the Scottish Highlands and Islands, 1930-1990* (Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1991); MacPhail, I.M.M., *The crofters' war* (Acair, Stornoway, 1989); Craig, D. *On the crofter's trail: in search on the clearance highlanders* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1990); Macarthur, E.M., *Iona: the living memory of a crofting community* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1990).

which adopted a classically Whiggish view; and the most quoted study of rural society is Littlejohn's seminal anthropological examination of a parish in the Southern Uplands, now some forty years old¹. More recent work has provided small additions to the rather limited published material. Examples are, Leneman's work on land settlement after the First World War, Fenton on rural protest in Aberdeenshire in 1913 and the ethnology of rural Scotland, particularly its language and productive technology, and Robertson on farm life in the Borders². It is only very recently that any valid attempt has been made to survey rural social conditions during the twentieth century, and the informative work of Jamieson and Toynbee, while concentrating primarily on the experiences of children, will hopefully be a forebear of future research³.

Agriculture is not, of course, entirely absent from the face of twentieth century Scottish historiography. General modern economic histories of Scotland continue to acknowledge its place, although social histories have been more arbitrary. For example, the third volume of *People and Society in Scotland* (covering the period 1914-1990) has little to say about rural matters, in direct contrast to the two earlier volumes⁴. The reason behind such an absence lies in the declining importance of agriculture, both as an employer and as a contributor to Scottish economic wealth (percentage of the male employed population, 1851 30%, 1901 14%; accounting for an estimated 4-8% of Scottish national income by the interwar period⁵). The burning problem for modern Scottish economic historians has been the poor

¹ Symon, J., *Scottish farming. Past and present* (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1958), chs.12-14 cover the years 1900-1939; Littlejohn, J., *Westrigg: the sociology of a Cheviot parish* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963).

² Robertson, B.W., 'The Border farm worker 1871-1971: industrial attitudes and behaviour' *Journal of Agricultural Labour Science*, 2 (1973), pp.65-93; Leneman, L., 'Lowland land settlement in the twentieth century: a forgotten segment of Scottish history' *Scottish Historical Review*, 67 (1988), pp.156-171; *idem*, *Fit for heroes?: land settlement in Scotland after World War 1* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen 1990); Fenton, A., *Scottish country life* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1976), *Wirds an' wark 'e seasons roon on an Aberdeenshire farm* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1987) and *The Turra Coo: a legal episode in the popular culture of north-east Scotland* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1989).

³ Jamieson, L. and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns: growing up 1900-1930* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992).

⁴ Lenman, B., *An economic history of modern Scotland 1660-1976* (Batsford, London, 1977), ch.7; Campbell, R.H., *Scotland since 1707: the rise of an industrial society* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1985), ch.14; Devine, T.M. and Mitchison, R. (eds.), *People and society in Scotland, I, 1760-1830* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1988); Fraser, W.H. and Morris, R.J. (eds.), *People and society in Scotland, II, 1830-1914*; Dickson, A. and Treble, J.H. (eds.), *People and society in Scotland, III, 1914-1990* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1992). On the other hand Smout included a useful chapter on rural areas in his modern social history of Scotland (Smout, T.C., *A century of the Scottish people*, ch.3).

⁵ Smout, T.C., *A century of the Scottish people*, p.58. For national income statistics see chapter 2.

industrial performance of the economy, particularly the over-concentration on old, staple industries. However, as one historian recently pointed out, agriculture remained a large employer relative to other industries¹, and was the dominant occupation in many Scottish counties.

Agricultural/rural history in Britain

The general absence of literature on the recent history of rural lowland Scotland is in direct contrast to England (and to some extent Wales). The long-term project of the Agricultural History of England and Wales, undertaken by Cambridge University Press, is almost complete, and the volume on the years 1914-1939 has been available since 1978². In addition, specific studies have been produced for the First World War and the period 1870-1947, all of which incorporate an examination of the growing role of agricultural policy³. Cooper and Smith have helped to revise the historiography of state policy in the period 1914-1939, arguing that a more systematic analysis of the available information results in a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the development of policy and the behaviour of the relevant institutions⁴. However, while government policies applied to England were very similar to those in Scotland, so-called 'British' studies usually fail either to examine the position in Scotland or to make extensive use of Scottish material⁵. For those operating in the source-rich environments of Cambridge, London and Oxford, Edinburgh must seem a

¹ Buxton, N.K., 'Economic growth in Scotland between the wars: the role of production structure and rationalization' *Economic History Review*, 33 (1980), p.546.

² Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history of England and Wales, VIII, 1914-39* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978). The seventh volume (1850-1914) is due to be published in the near future.

³ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture in the First World War* (Routledge, London, 1989); Brown, J., *Agriculture in England: a survey of farming, 1870-1947* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987). It is interesting to note that a recent survey of British agrarian historiography concluded that the post 1918 years had received limited academic attention compared to previous periods; Mingay, G., 'British rural history: themes in agricultural history and rural social history' in P.Lowe and M.Bodiguel (eds.), *Rural studies in Britain and France* (Belhaven, London, 1990), pp.85-87.

⁴ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy, 1912-36: a study in Conservative politics* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989); Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support in Britain: the development of the agricultural policy community* (Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1990).

⁵ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy, 1912-36*; Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture in the First World War*; Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture in Western Europe 1880-1988* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1989); Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support in Britain*.

long way to travel just for a few paragraphs or the odd chapter. The result has been that, while the basic parameters within which Scottish agriculture operated can be relatively easily identified, their detailed impact cannot.

Labour has not escaped the growth of interest in modern English agricultural history, and there have been a variety of approaches to the subject. The traditional approach, focusing very tightly on paid agricultural employment, and stressing continuity and consensus rather than socio-economic conflict, has been reiterated recently by Armstrong¹, who can be placed alongside the works of Horn and Mingay². They present a very descriptive view of English rural life, which has generally failed to take on board the conclusions of the 'new' rural history. This latter school stresses the importance of an inter-disciplinary view of rural society, and a shift away from the 'plough-and-cow' approach of which previous agricultural historians stand accused³. The view of the traditional approach by the 'new' radicals is best demonstrated in a review of Armstrong's book by Snell.

'At its worst, the book is an example of old-fashioned conservative rural historiography (the crumbling Canterbury school of 'bash the Hammonds/sunny side of the landscape/landlords, farmers and labourers always liked each other really') trying to catch up with and downgrade the wide range of liberal and labour social history which has so outstripped it in originality, solid research, empathy and liveliness: trying to cover its errors without losing face, repeatedly ignoring published evidence and arguments (let alone questions) it finds disconcerting, often caricaturing viewpoints different from its own, and occasionally making tendentious and very poorly substantiated claims on movements in rural real wages.'⁴

As far as farm labour is concerned, the new rural history has come from two sources. Firstly, the social demographers (inspired by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure), who have used detailed

¹ Armstrong, A., *Farmworkers: a social and economic history 1770-1980* (Batsford, London, 1988).

² Horn, P., *Labouring life in the Victorian countryside* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1976) and *Rural life in England in the First World War* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1984); Mingay, G.E., *Rural life in Victorian England* (Heinemann, London, 1976).

³ Bellamy, L., Snell, K.D.M. and Williamson, T., 'Rural history: the prospect before us' *Rural History*, 1 (1990), pp.1-4; Snell, K.D.M., 'Rural history: towards a new disciplinary incorporation' *Scottish Economic & Social History*, 10 (1990), pp.127-128; Reed, M. and Wells, R. (eds.), *Class, conflict and protest in the English countryside 1700-1880* (Cass, London, 1990), p.1.

⁴ Snell, K.D.M., Review of Armstrong, A., *Farmworkers* in *Social History*, 15 (1990), pp.120-121; see also Howkins, A., 'Social history and agricultural history' *Agricultural History Review*, 40 (1992), pp.160-163.

local records to argue for a more complete view of rural labour, in particular the inclusion of women, and who stress the role played by changing social relations between employer and employed¹. The second group has emerged from labour history, associated partially with the History Workshop Collective, challenging the traditional view of the modern farm workers as deferential, and focusing on social and cultural change in the countryside and conflict in and around the workplace².

The major drawback with both these 'new' approaches, and the accompanying Wells-Charlesworth debate on rural social conflict in the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries³, has been that they have focused entirely on the south and east of Britain. They therefore ignore the potential for substantial regional variations in areas where conditions for rural settlement and agricultural production differ substantially. A fact which has not escaped the notice of some of the participants.

'Agricultural historiography in Britain has always been shot through with southern English insularity. The proportions that the Wells-Charlesworth debate took on, never envisaged by the original combatants, must be regarded as somewhat inflated when one notes that hardly a reference is made to any event north of Birmingham or west of Gloucester. The shadow cast by the Hammonds' *The Village Labourer*, more correctly titled 'The Southern English Village Labourer' has indeed been a long one.'⁴

There is also a dearth of recent material on modern Welsh rural history, with the exception of the considerable attention paid to the Rebecca riots of the early nineteenth century; one continues to rely on the valuable work of Howell and Jenkins⁵. Recent efforts to produce a history of agricultural trade

¹ Kussmaul, A., *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981); Snell, K.D.M., *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985).

² Morgan, D.H., *Harvesters and harvesting 1840-1900: a study of the rural proletariat* (Croom Helm, London, 1982); Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men: rural radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985) and *Reshaping rural England: a social history 1850-1925* (Harper Collins, London, 1991).

³ Reed, M. and Wells, R. (eds.), *Class, conflict and protest in the English countryside*.

⁴ Charlesworth, A., 'An agenda for historical studies of rural protest in Britain, 1750-1850' *Rural History*, 2 (1991), p.238; see also comments by Howkins, A., 'Labour history and the rural poor' *Rural History*, 1 (1990), p.119. Howkins in his most recent book (*Reshaping rural England*) placed great stress on the regionality of rural social patterns. The publication referred to in the quote is the classic study, Hammond, J.L. and B., *The village labourer 1760-1832: a study in the government of England before the Reform Bill* (Longmans, London, 1911).

⁵ Jenkins, D., *The agricultural community in south-west Wales at the turn of the twentieth century* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1971); Howell, D.W., *Land and people in nineteenth-century Wales* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1977); Jones, D.J.V., *Before*

unionism in Wales for the period 1889-1950 have only resulted in an excessively descriptive and heavily Marxist piece of history that does little to extend a fuller understanding of recent, rural social change to the principality¹.

While the historiography of rural social history has moved forward at a rapid pace, many of the general 'agricultural histories' mentioned earlier have not been innovative in terms of information or methodology. There have been a few exceptions to this. Dewey's work over the last two decades has radically altered the interpretation of events during the First World War by arguing that farming did not suffer a dramatic reduction in labour supplies or achieve a significant increase in the production of grain². Smith and Cooper's analyses of the development of agricultural policy-making communities are also of importance³. Meanwhile, the quantitative school has made a small intrusion with an econometric study of the impact of trade unionism in late nineteenth-century England; this concludes that there was a noticeable medium term increase in wages associated with the trade union agitation of the early 1870s⁴. However, these works excluded, the economic history of British agriculture in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries remains unadventurous and undeveloped.

Mainstream modern economic history has tended to ignore agriculture, a fact most clearly demonstrated by an examination of the extensive literature on labour markets in the interwar period. Here the emphasis has been on explaining changing patterns in labour supply and demand, and the resulting high levels of unemployment amongst the insured labour force⁵. One struggles to find references to farming. A glaring omission, given the fluctuating fortunes of the industry at the time, and the dramatic labour market interventions by the state with the introduction of minimum wages in 1917, 1924 and 1937, and of unemployment insurance in 1936. It also

Rebecca: popular protests in Wales, 1793-1835 (Allen Lane, London, 1973) and *Rebecca's children: a study of rural society, crime, and protest* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989).

¹ Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed: farm workers' trade unions in Wales 1889-1950* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1989).

² Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture in the First World War*.

³ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*; Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*.

⁴ Boyer, G.R. and Hatton, T.J., 'Did Joseph Arch raise agricultural wages? Rural trade unions and the labour market in late-nineteenth-century England' CEPR Discussion Paper no.484 (Centre for Economic Policy Research, London, 1990).

⁵ Garside, W.R., *British unemployment 1919-1939: a study in public policy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), ch.1. Agriculture was excluded from the state unemployment insurance scheme until 1936.

ignores the extensive trade union activity of the 1920s. However, even if such an analysis had taken place, it is likely that there would be little direct comparison with the new approaches of the rural social historians, for the two sides do not speak the same language. The economists stress the econometric analysis of aggregate statistics - employment, wages, output, investment, benefit levels - concepts which are anathema to the new rural social historians, who focus on the role of social interaction within the locality¹. Noticeable by its absence has been effective communication between the various approaches undertaken by historians, both conceptual and empirical. The result has been a disparate and weakened literature.

'The ignorance about the rural past that the debate revealed, is of two kinds. One is empirical. There is so much about which we know so little....The other massive shortcoming of both the debate and of rural history in general is theoretical. The failure of most historians of rural England to develop clear concepts and models firmly located within a body of theory, is perhaps the most significant deficiency of rural history. The development of suitable concepts can occur only through the inter-relationship of empirical research and a recognition of the underlying premises that inform historians' practice.'²

Modern rural studies

When seeking a conceptual framework for the historical study of rural areas, the social science historian can turn to a number of disciplines. Most influential has been the work on East Anglia during the 1970s by Newby and others, who undertook a sociological study of farmworkers and farmers, thus providing a structure for the examination of social relations within the countryside³. Since then, the only person to take up the issue of the socio-economic position of hired agricultural employees has been the political scientist Danziger, who analysed the 'powerlessness' of organised

¹ Reed, M. and Wells, R. (eds.), *Class, conflict and protest in the English countryside*, pp.220-221. The exception to this generalisation is the work of Snell; Snell, K.D.M., *Annals of the labouring poor*.

² Reed, M. and Wells, R. (eds.), *Class, conflict and protest in the English countryside*, p.3.

³ Newby, H., *The deferential worker: a study of farm workers in East Anglia* (Allen Lane, London, 1977); Newby, H., Bell, C., Rose, D. and Saunders, P., *Property, paternalism and power: class and control in rural England* (Hutchison, London, 1978).

agricultural labour in England during the years since the Second World War¹.

Meanwhile, the study of behaviour within the labour market has not generally been an area of interest for agricultural economists. There were a few econometric studies of wage determination, which were limited in their applicability². Labour mobility was one issue which did attract attention, but the vast majority of work focused on rural-urban movement rather than rates of turnover within the industry³. A similar conclusion can be made for rural geography, where the prime motivation for the study of employment was the shift of labour resources out of agriculture⁴. In fact during the 1980s and 1990s agricultural labour disappeared from the rural studies agenda⁵.

On the other hand, there has been a rapid expansion in the examination of labour market behaviour by non-agricultural economists during the last two decades, with labour economics having firmly established itself as an academic discipline. Of particular interest is the growth in the study of recruitment and contractual patterns, especially the flow of information within the labour market, and the movement of individual workers between firms⁶. Such work has enabled the subject to move beyond the analysis of wages and employment at the macroeconomic level into a more microeconomic approach examining the behaviour of individuals, though, of course, the former remain important variables.

Thus, in the last twenty years, a whole range of conceptual frameworks have emerged, into which the historical study of agricultural labour can be placed. This, at a time when the examination of rural social history has undergone a radical shift, moving away from the traditional concentration on

¹ Danziger, R. *Political powerlessness: agricultural workers in post-war England* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988).

² Cowling, K and Metcalf, D., 'An analysis of the determinants of wage inflation in agriculture' *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, 33 (1965), pp.179-204; *idem*, 'Determinants of wage inflation in Scottish agriculture, 1948-63', *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, 34 (1966), pp.189-195; Dawson, P.J., 'An analysis of wage adjustment in British agriculture 1948-1975' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 31 (1980), pp.201-214; Philpott, J.C. and Tyler, G.J., 'Interpersonal variation in farm workers' earnings: analysis of wage and employment data' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 38 (1987), pp.463-472.

³ The exception to this is Gasson, R., 'Turnover and size of labour force on farms' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 25 (1974), pp.115-127.

⁴ Phillips, D. and Williams, A., *Rural Britain: a social geography* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984), chs.2-3.

⁵ Lowe, P. and Bodiguel, M. (eds.), *Rural studies in Britain and France* (Belhaven, London, 1990), chs.9 and 18.

⁶ Sapsford, D. and Tzannatos, Z. (eds.), *Current issues in labour economics* (Macmillan, London, 1990), chs. 3-4.

'agricultural' history into the broader analysis of rural societies. Therefore a study of Scottish farm labour in the first part of the twentieth century offers an excellent opportunity to place the new sociological, economic and historical approaches within a field as yet relatively untouched by academic analysis.

Scottish farm workers, 1900-1939

In 1921, 194,301 Scots were employed in agricultural occupations, with the largest occupational group being farm workers (102,580¹). A majority of these were regular, full-time workers who constituted the major labour input. A large number of casual workers were still employed, but their numbers had been in decline since the late nineteenth century². Regular farm workers are taken to be 'farm servants', that is, those workers who were employed on the basis of long-term contracts (six months or a year). Casual workers were primarily seasonal in their employment, often hired for a specific task and on an hourly/daily basis, the most famous being the Irish 'tattie' gangs who continued to migrate to many areas of northern Britain³.

The exception to the above assertion was in the Highlands where crofting, in combination with large extensive estates, produced a very different form of agricultural production and rural land use. Family-run smallholdings provided food for subsistence and a limited market, and estates relied on extensive sheep and deer grazing plus some recreational income. The result was the general absence of regular hired agricultural employees from the Highland counties⁴. Given the very different circumstances prevailing within the Highlands, the area is specifically excluded from this thesis which focuses on the Lowlands, which are taken to include the counties of Aberdeen, Ayr, Banff, Berwick, Clackmannan, Dumbarton, Dumfries, East Lothian, Fife, Forfar (or Angus), Kincardine, Kinross, Kirkcudbright, Lanark,

¹ *Report on the thirteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1924). There are problems in using the population census as an accurate measure of agricultural employment. For a discussion of these matters see chapter 3.

² Campbell, R.H. and Devine, T.M., 'The rural experience', pp.56-57; Howatson, W., 'Grain harvesting and harvesters' in Devine, T.M., *Farm servants and labour*, pp.132-135. In 1921 the Agricultural Census calculated that there were 103,741 regular workers and 23,027 casual workers in Scotland; *Agricultural statistics, 1921*, p.49.

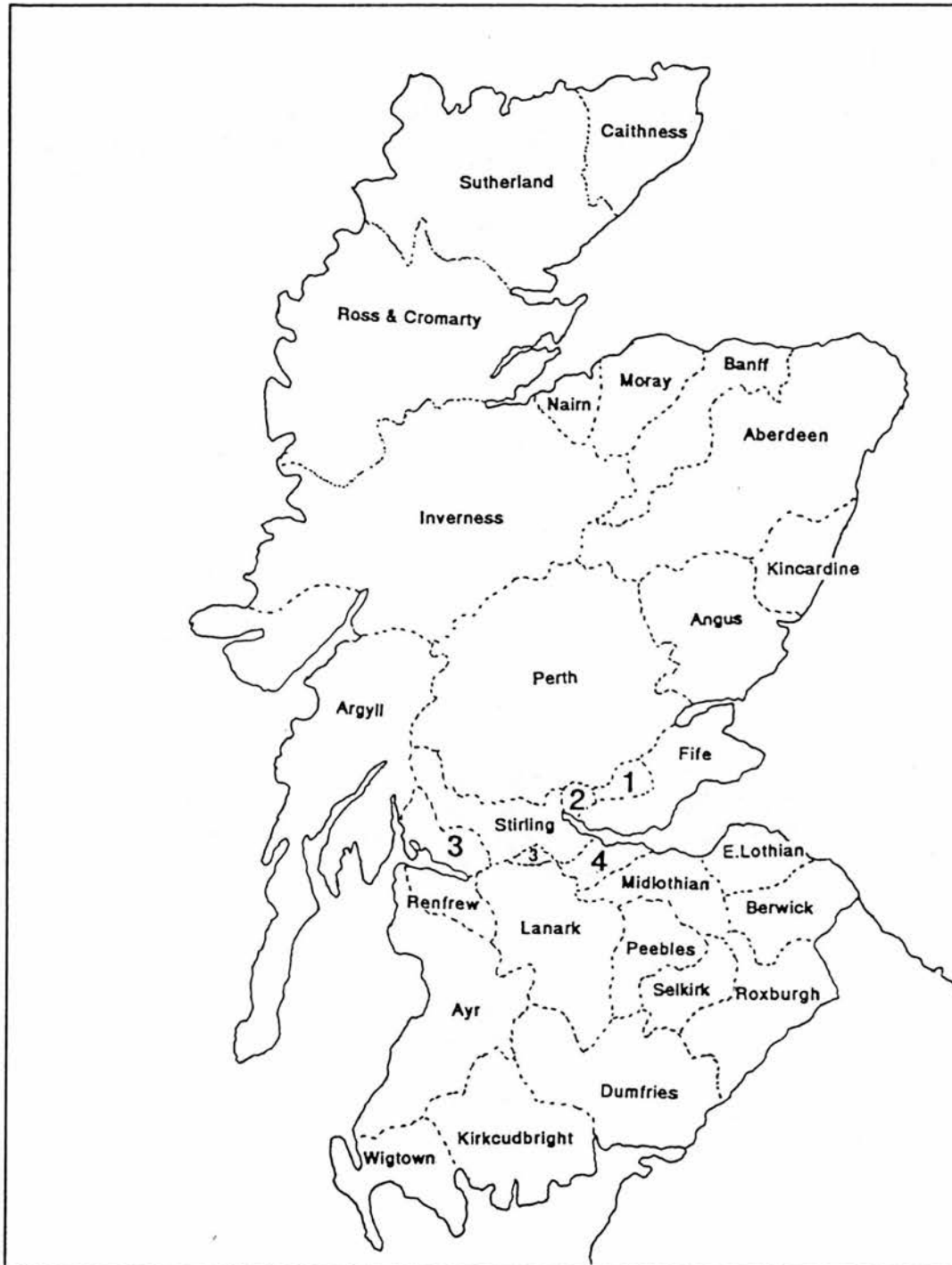
³ O'Dowd, A., *Spalpeens and tattie hokers: history and folklore of the Irish migratory agricultural worker in Ireland and Britain* (Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1991).

⁴ Hunter, J., *The making of the crofting community* and *The claim of crofting*; Toynbee, C. and Jamieson, L., 'Some responses to economic change in Scottish farming and crofting family life, 1900-25' *Sociological Review*, 37 (1989), pp.706-732.

Midlothian, Peebles, Perth, Renfrew, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Stirling, West Lothian and Wigtown (see Map).

The start date of the thesis (1900) is in itself rather arbitrary, the important aim being to identify the broad patterns within which the Scottish agricultural labour market had developed during the nineteenth century and the condition it was in prior to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The major economic fluctuations which then took place, the demands of the war economy, followed by relative depression from 1921 onwards (culminating in the well-known slump of the early 1930s), provide an exciting backdrop to the study of farm labour. 1939 should not be viewed as a sudden break with the past. Indeed there was a considerable level of continuity with previous decades. Nevertheless, a number of major changes, notably in the fields of state intervention and labour-saving technology, do mark the years of the Second World War as worthy of separate study.

Map: The counties of mainland Scotland



1. Kinross
2. Clackmannan
3. Dumbarton
4. West Lothian

The literature surveyed earlier in this chapter raises a number of issues of particular relevance to the Scottish agricultural labour market. The impact of the First World War on British agriculture has been highlighted by Dewey, notably the importance of changed market conditions and government policy, an analysis which requires an extension to the Scottish experience¹. The development of agricultural policy in general during the first half of the twentieth century has received considerable attention, with both Cooper and Smith arguing that greater emphasis should be placed on the analysis of an 'agricultural policy community', including the development of a number of political institutions². Therefore the formation of policy, the development of institutions and the impact of their activities will form the basis of much of the early part of the thesis.

Meanwhile, the new rural social history has thrown up a number of areas that are of interest in the study of farm labour. There has been a continual focus upon the factors that governed the relationships between employer and employed. Yet, with the exception of Carter, the historical analysis has consistently failed to place its work within a conceptual framework, and Carter restricted himself to an overtly Marxist approach³. This is despite the availability of a highly-developed and well-established Weberian framework associated with the sociologist Newby. The new rural history continues along this line by presenting fascinating information on numerous aspects of labour market operation, the hiring of workers, the nature and enforcement of contracts and the importance of labour mobility, but one struggles to find a theoretical basis for much of the analysis⁴. Developing satisfactory theoretical structures will emerge as a major part of the detailed study of the conditions of farm labour, yet the major issue still remains the absence of a historiography of twentieth century rural lowland Scotland. Quite simply, little is known or understood about the economic and social patterns occurring within farming communities as, for example, the economic condition of the agricultural industry, the impact of institutional policy, patterns of employment, wage levels, changes in the supply and demand for labour; the possible areas of study and the potential issues to be examined are almost endless. It would clearly be a mistake for a doctoral thesis to attempt a

¹ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*.

² Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*; Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*.

³ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, pp.5-7.

⁴ Kussmaul, A., *Farm servants in husbandry*; Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses: the horselads of East Yorkshire* (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991).

definitive history of Scottish agriculture and farm labour, particularly since the available literature, historical, economic and sociological, has already identified a number of subjects as worthy of specific attention. Therefore the strategy adopted is one of providing a basic economic background, within which certain issues of particular interest can be examined in detail.

The thesis itself is split into two broad sections. The first section (chapters 2-4) contains an examination of the broad aggregate patterns of employment within lowland Scottish agriculture. However, given the absence of any general literature on the development of agriculture within lowland Scotland during the period under investigation, it is necessary to undertake a major investigation into the economic condition of farming at the time, and this forms the basis of chapter 2. With the basic parameters of agricultural development outlined, it is then possible to progress to an examination of the market for regular labour itself, including the measurement and level of employment, the structure of the labour force (in terms of age, gender and occupation), geographical variations in contractual and housing conditions, remuneration (cash wages, perquisites, differentials on the basis of occupation, age and sex), and concluding with an identification of the fluctuating trends in the demand for and supply of agricultural labour.

The early twentieth century also marks a period of major institutional intervention in the Scottish agricultural labour market¹, and of the three main institutions involved (the Board/Department of Agriculture for Scotland, the National Farmers' Union of Scotland and the Scottish Farm Servants' Union), only one has received limited academic attention². Therefore, in chapter 4 the histories of all three are outlined, followed by an analysis of the policies advocated and implemented by them, which included voluntary collective bargaining, wage regulation, the introduction of health and unemployment insurance and a variety of subsidies to improve the condition of rural housing.

The above chapters all discuss conditions throughout the Lowlands, providing a 'national' picture whilst at the same time acknowledging the extensive regional diversity of rural Scotland. However, as Carter so aptly

¹ Anthony, R., 'The Scottish agricultural labour market, 1900-1939: a case of institutional intervention' *Economic History Review*, 46 (1993), pp.558-574.

² Smith, J.H., *Joe Duncan: the Scottish farm servants and British agriculture* (R.C.S.S., University of Edinburgh and Scottish Labour History Society, Edinburgh, 1973); Robertson, B.W., 'The Scottish farm servant and his union: from encapsulation to integration' in I.MacDougall (ed.), *Essays in Scottish labour history* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1978), pp.90-114.

pointed out, regional variations in the nature of agricultural production produce a multiplicity of different employment conditions, and to understand fully the operation of the labour market requires detailed local studies.

'The lessons are clear. If we are to understand the agrarian history of nineteenth century Scotland, then we must stop seeing a failure to move rapidly to a polarised social formation as evidence of social conservatism, and study the concrete articulation of different modes of production worked by different groups in the social formation. This means getting our boots dirty in local studies. One can try to force the agrarian history of the Scottish lowlands into the Procustean bed of the Lothian social formation, but the truncated and bleeding corpse that will emerge is not likely to be able to tell us much about agrarian capitalism - a highly variable entity - in the very different conditions of Galloway, Perthshire and Caithness. Until more local studies have been undertaken we will not be able to begin to generalise about 'lowland agriculture' as a whole.'¹

Such a call cannot go unanswered, for the behaviour of individual farmers and workers within the labour market was governed as much by local as national conditions, a view that has been at the forefront of the 'new' rural social history². The local study of the labour market therefore forms the focus of the second section (chapters 5-8). Of critical importance is the selection of the areas for local study. Two were chosen (Dumfriesshire and East Lothian) on the basis of differing patterns of agricultural production and differing positions within the economic geography of Scotland, factors which are identified in chapter 5. The use of local studies also enables the incorporation of much of the theoretical structure provided by rural sociologists and labour economists over the last two decades, giving the thesis a distinctive inter-disciplinary approach. In the case of the microeconomics, a number of particular functions were identified as worthy of study, not just on the basis of theoretical interest, but also a product of the important role which these issues played in the Scottish agricultural labour market. Consequently, chapter 6 comprises a detailed examination of the patterns of recruitment and the nature and enforcement of contracts, including a history of the decline of the hiring fair as a medium of recruitment, and the effectiveness of the continued use of long-term contracts by employers and workers³. Directly linked to these factors is the

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, p.181.

² Howkins, A., *Reshaping rural England*, chs.1-2.

³ Howkins regarded regional variations in recruitment as a particularly good indicator of the different labour market regimes under which farm employees worked; Howkins, A., 'The

issue of the mobility of farm servants within the industry, and the causes and consequences of labour movement are examined in chapter 7.

Clearly the recruitment methods, contractual conditions, and patterns of labour mobility involve social as well as economic factors. The 'new' rural history has identified social relations as an area worthy of extensive analysis, as have rural sociologists. In the light of such work, the relations between farmer and worker are analysed in a direct sociological context in chapter 8, drawing heavily on the work of Newby.

The diverse range of issues which this thesis examines, combined with the analysis of patterns at national and local level, results in the deployment of a variety of methodologies and sources. The result is a wide-ranging study of labour market conditions, but it makes undertaking a broad overview of methodologies difficult. It appeared to be more productive to provide detailed descriptions of the appropriate concepts and techniques at a point where they can be linked to specific parts of the thesis. A separate methodology/source chapter would be difficult to write in a coherent manner, and would only result in unnecessary repetition at the point where the various concepts and techniques are used.

However, it would be inappropriate, in an introductory chapter, not to provide an overview of the basic approaches that are adopted throughout the various parts of the thesis. The first section (chapters 2-4) is relatively orthodox in its approach. An analysis of the economic performance of farming and the agricultural labour market relies heavily on the standard statistical sources, notably the annual agricultural returns. Where appropriate, a statistical critique of such material is undertaken, for example, in chapter 3, the use of occupational classifications when measuring the size of the labour force and the accuracy of wage data. In addition, a substantial quantity of information has been obtained from parliamentary and official publications, including two Royal Commissions on Agriculture (1894-7 and 1919), the Royal Commission on Labour (1893-4) and the Royal Commission on Housing (1917)¹. Both chapters 2 and 3 synthesise this

English farm labourer in the nineteenth century: farm, family and community' in B.Short (ed.), *The English rural community: image and analysis* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992), pp.85-104.

¹ *Royal Commission on Labour: the agricultural labourer*, III (P.P.1893-4, XXXVI, Cd.6894); *Royal Commission on the Agricultural Depression. Minutes of evidence*, I-III (P.P.1894, XVI, Cd.7400-I, II, III), IV (P.P.1896, XVII, Cd.8021); *Reports: on Perth and Forfar* (P.P.1894, XVI, Pt.I, Cd.7432); *on Ayr, Wigtown, Kirkcudbright and Dumfries* (P.P.1895, XVII, Cd.7625); *on Roxburgh, Peebles, Selkirk, Berwick, Linlithgow, Edinburgh, Haddington, Banff, Nairn and Elgin* (P.P.1895, XVII, Cd.7742); *Farm Accounts* (P.P.1896, XVI, Cd.8125); *Final Report*

information to provide a description and analysis of the important national economic trends. The examination of the behaviour of institutions (chapter 4) is more reliant on subjective material provided by the relevant bodies. The records of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union (SFSU) and the National Farmers Union of Scotland primarily consist of the minutes of the relevant central committees, and, in the case of the former, circulars to branches. In addition, the SFSU published a monthly journal (*Scottish Farm Servant*) from 1913 to 1931 which provides extensive information on union activities and policy. Material relevant to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland and other government departments comes mainly from files in the Public Record Office and the Scottish Record Office, the standard historical sources. Analysis of the policies and effectiveness of these institutions was corroborated, where possible, from other contemporary sources, such as government reports and commissions, the farming press (*Scottish Farmer*), and the available secondary literature.

The thesis becomes interdisciplinary and novel in its nature in the second section (chapters 5-8), where it provides an examination of aspects of labour market operation and farmer/worker relations within the locality. The previous secondary literature has tended to separate work on the locality from examinations of national patterns and policy, as seen for example, if one compares the work of Carter, Caunce and Howkins with that of Cooper, Dewey and Whetham¹. The use of newspaper reports on the operation of hiring fairs and the results of court cases, and the focus on individual experience through oral history (a method which is discussed explicitly in chapter 5), are sources that are well established. Where possible, information from oral history is combined with that of contemporary comment, to provide a more accurate picture. The study of worker mobility is undertaken by using a relatively new source, valuation rolls, within an established methodology, nominal record linkage and letter cluster sampling. The theoretical structure for chapters 6-8 is provided by the labour economic theories of job search, contracts and worker mobility, and a

(P.P.1897, XV, Cd.8450); *Report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban* (P.P.1917-18, XIV, Cd.8731); *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Interim report* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.479); *Evidence, I-IV* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.345, 365, 391, 445), V (P.P.1920, IX, Cd.665).

¹Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history of England and Wales*; Carter, I., *Farm life in northeast Scotland*; Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*; Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*; Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*.

sociological theory of rural social stratification. This is the first time that many of these concepts have been utilised in historical analysis.

To clarify the broad aims of the thesis; it provides a detailed examination of labour market conditions, operations and behaviour, within lowland Scottish agriculture during the period 1900-39. In doing so, it is the first major study of the industry during the early part of the twentieth century, and of the labour market specifically. Much of the subject matter is unknown to economic and social historians. The thesis also breaks new ground by utilising both economic and sociological theory to examine the agricultural labour market within the locality in a distinctive inter-disciplinary manner, offering an extension in both theoretical and empirical terms to agricultural economic history and the 'new' rural social history.

Chapter 2: The agricultural history of Scotland, 1900-1939

Both the absence of a recent agricultural history of Scotland, and the requirement for a general background in agricultural development for future chapters, make an examination of the history of Scotland's farming industry a necessity. The simplest grasp of economics would soon make the historian realise that the basic patterns of labour demand, and the general conditions in which employer and worker have to negotiate, are governed by the economic condition of the specific industry. The last general survey was Symon's *Scottish farming. Past and present* published in 1959, a book gloating in the success of farming during the Second World War, and taking a very Whiggish view of developments up to the post-war settlement¹.

For modern secondary literature, the economic historian has to fall back on agricultural histories of England². From these, a three-stage history of broad agricultural trends can be identified for the first four decades of the twentieth century; i) 1900-14 - a period of stability and recovery following the so-called 'agricultural depression' of the 1870s-1890s, ii) 1914-21 - the First World War and post-war boom years associated with a high level of domestic demand for food products and rising commodity prices, and iii) 1921-39 - years of general depression, particularly 1921-3 and 1929-33, followed by gradual recovery in the mid and late 1930s. Each period will be examined in detail, with reference to the pattern of prices, the financial position of the industry, and the impact of government policy. However, to avoid general repetition and provide a broader overview, the chapter will initially present a long term picture of agricultural trends - land use, livestock numbers, output, structure of landholding, and regional patterns.

At this stage it should be made clear that, whilst a general agricultural history of Scotland is to be laid out in the sections below, the Highland and Islands are specifically excluded, not only because the thesis is an examination of Lowland agricultural labour markets, but also in

¹ Symon, J.A., *Scottish farming. Past and present* (Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh, 1959). Symon almost certainly took his title from the standard agricultural history of England at the time, Prothero, R.E. (Lord Ernle), *English farming. Past and present* (1st edition - Longmans, London, 1912; 6th edition - Heineman, London, 1961).

² For example, Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history of England and Wales, VII, 1914-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1978); Brown, J., *Agriculture in England: a survey of farming, 1870-1947* (Manchester University Press, 1987). For a detailed unpublished guide to British agricultural policy in the period 1914-39, see Webber, A.R., 'Government policy and British agriculture, 1917-1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent, 1982).

acknowledgement of the very different conditions under which Highland agriculture developed¹.

¹ For a general guide to Highland agrarian history see Hunter, J., *The making of the crofting community* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1976), and *The claim of crofting: the Scottish Highland and Islands, 1930-1990* (Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1991); Orr, W., *Deer forests, landlords and crofters. The Western Highlands in Victorian and Edwardian times* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1982).

Long-term trends

In agricultural history the years 1900-14 are usually placed as an addendum at the end of discussions concerning the 'Agricultural Depression', and regarded as a period of gradual improvement from the ravages of low prices during the 1870s and 1890s. Since Fletcher's seminal article appeared in 1961, the whole debate on whether the late nineteenth century can be considered as one of 'depression' has been open to question¹. Prior to Fletcher, the basic argument had been that the 'depression' had commenced with the decline in cereal (especially wheat) prices during the mid 1870s, resulting from the opening up of the American prairies to large-scale agricultural production and export, and with the ability of Argentina, Australia and New Zealand to export cheap meat with the introduction of refrigerated shipping in the 1890s². Farming shrank in the face of foreign competition. In fact the most recent calculations of United Kingdom agricultural output during the period 1867-1914 have found that the depression was one of prices rather than output (when considered in real terms). More important was the shift in production that changing price differentials induced, away from cereals and into livestock³. The first decade and a half of the twentieth century were marked by rising nominal output and prices, though real output was only static, again suggesting the 'recovery' was a price-perceived one.

The actual position of Scotland within this general picture is unclear, since most analyses have focused on England and most statistics available are either for Great Britain or the United Kingdom. Some of the work since Fletcher has emphasised the regional nature of 'depression' in England, with the south and east suffering as against the continued, though fluctuating, prosperity of livestock production in the north and west⁴.

¹ Fletcher, T.W., 'The great depression of English agriculture 1873-1896' *Economic History Review*, 13 (1961), pp.417-432; see also Perry, P.J. (ed.), *British agriculture 1875-1914* (Metheun, London, 1973).

² Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture. The principles of future policy* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1939), pp.69-70; Orwin, C.S. and Whetham, E.H., *History of British agriculture 1846-1914* (Longmans, London, 1964), pp.260-1 and 396.

³ Turner, M., 'Output and prices in UK agriculture, 1867-1914, and the great agricultural depression reconsidered' *Agricultural History Review*, 40 (1992), pp.38-51.

⁴ Perry, P.J., 'Where was the "great agricultural depression"?' in Perry, P.J. (ed.), *British agriculture*, pp.129-148; Thompson, F.M.L., 'An anatomy of English agriculture, 1870-1914' in B.A.Holderiness and M.Turner (eds.), *Land, labour and agriculture, 1700-1920. Essays for Gordon Mingay* (Hambleton, London, 1991), pp.211-240.

Table 1: Agricultural output, by country, 1908 (%)

Sector	England & Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
Farm Crops	31.5	27.7	30.9
Horticulture*	3.7	2.2	3.5
Animals	39.8	45.8	40.7
Wool	1.7	2.2	1.7
Dairy Produce	20.0	19.4	19.9
Poultry	3.4	2.8	3.3

Note: * fruit, flowers & timber

Source: *The agricultural output of Great Britain. Report...in connection with the Census of Production Act 1906* (P.P. 1912-13, X, Cd.6277), p.25

Agricultural production in Scotland was dominated by livestock, particularly sheep in upland areas, dairying in the South-West, and beef production in the North-East¹; even the predominantly arable areas of the South-East exercised complex six or seven course rotations that relied on the integration of both sheep and cattle into the agricultural enterprise. As one economist noted: 'The most obvious characteristic of Scottish cropping is that land use is largely conditioned by, and indeed subordinated to, the needs of livestock production.'² The emphasis on livestock production meant that Scottish farmers were in a fortunate position in combating the pressures of increased international competition, particularly in the development of the liquid milk market in Glasgow for the South-West, and the growing quality-beef market in London for the North-East³.

Turning specifically to the years 1900-14, a starting point for the analysis of output is the 1908 Census of Production, which gives a national breakdown of the value of products sold off the farm for consumption (Table 1).

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland, 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), ch.3; Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers: changes in rural society in south-west Scotland before 1914* (Aberdeen University Press, 1991), pt. II.

² Whitby, H., 'Some changes in the structure of Scottish agriculture since 1870' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 8 (1950), p.315. This article, some forty years old, remains the best guide to the changes in Scottish agriculture during the period under examination. A more general review of farming in Britain during the period 1895-1914 is Orwin, C.S. and Whetham, E.H., *History of British agriculture*, ch.13.

³ Hall, A.D., *A pilgrimage of British farming 1910-1912* (John Murray, London, 1914), p.377; Whitby, H., 'Some changes', p.313; Carter, I., *Farm life*, ch.3; Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers*, pt. II.

Table 2: Cropping patterns and livestock numbers per 100 acres of cultivated land, 1908

	Great Britain	England & Wales	Scotland
Arable*	45.9	41.7	69.7
Wheat	5.1	5.8	0.9
Barley	5.2	5.4	4.1
Oats	9.7	7.9	19.5
Potatoes	1.7	1.5	3.0
Turnips	4.8	4.1	9.1
Rotation Grass	13.7	10.5	31.9
Permanent Grass	54.1	58.3	30.3
Cattle	21.4	21.0	24.1
Sheep ^a	60.2	63.3	53.4
Pigs	8.8	9.8	3.0
Rough Grazing	39.7	13.6	186.7

Note: * Arable: all cropped land including rotation grasses

^a per 100 acres of cultivated land and rough grazing

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1908

The most striking comment that can be made is the similarity between the gross output of Scotland and the rest of Britain, the only noticeable difference being a slightly reduced emphasis on 'Farm Crops' and a greater reliance on 'Animals'. However, the analysis provided in Table 1 is extremely simplistic, grouping a high proportion of production into just two categories, and ignoring the potential impact of complex cropping rotations which were in use throughout Britain at the time.

The danger of such an oversimplification is demonstrated in Table 2, which shows the national breakdown of agricultural land use patterns. Some major differences in the structure of agricultural production are now discernible. Firstly a much higher proportion of the land in Scotland was 'arable', i.e. it was part of some form of a cropping rotation. Most of the difference is accounted for by the position of rotation grass (31.9% in Scotland compared to 10.5% in England and Wales). This results from the greater importance of

mixed production in Scotland, where complex rotations focused on off-farm sales of livestock products and on-farm consumption of farm-produced feedstuffs. For cereals, there was very little wheat in Scotland, some barley (often for the distilling market), and large acreages of oats, which were only produced as a cash crop on a large scale in the North-East. The result was that fewer Scottish farms specialised in livestock production using off-farm feedstuffs. The other major feature was the greater occurrence of rough grazing in Scotland, in fact Scotland accounted for about 71% of total British rough grazing. If one excludes the Highlands, then the figure for Scotland is 92.1 (per 100 acres of cropped land - see Table 4), still substantially above that for England and Wales, a result of the 'upland' topography of many lowland counties¹.

The spatial distribution of cropping and livestock patterns across the Scottish counties for 1908 is given in Table 3, demonstrating the regional specialisations of lowland Scottish agriculture². Wheat and barley were only important in the Lothians, Fife, Forfar and Kincardine, with oats being widespread throughout the country. The extensive occurrence of rotation grass confirms the importance of mixed agriculture, though permanent grass was a strong feature in areas that had livestock specialisations (dairy cattle in the South-West and sheep in the Borders). The division between dairy and 'other' cattle is one that can be questioned. Scottish agricultural statistics did not divide herds into 'beef' and 'dairy' until 1933, and dairy cattle are taken to be those 'in calf or in milk'. The high densities recorded in Ayr, Dumbarton, Lanark, Renfrew and Wigtown confirm the location of specialised dairy production. In the latter county the production of cheese was as important as milk, the others were closely linked to the Glasgow milk market³. Some of the 'other' cattle were certainly part of dairying herds, however the sizeable numbers recorded in Aberdeen and Banff confirms the position of the North-East as a major beef-producing region. Sheep were

¹ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture in the First World War* (Routledge, London, 1989), pp.10-11. Some of the 'lowland' counties contained substantial upland areas in particular Perthshire, a county that can be considered both highland and lowland in agricultural terms; also the Southern Uplands in the Borders and Dumfries & Galloway [Coppock, J.T., *An agricultural atlas of Scotland* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1976), pp.11 and 45]. The analysis of cropping and livestock patterns during this and other sections relies heavily on Whitby, H., 'Some changes in the structure'.

² A good description of agricultural practices in the Lothians, Aberdeenshire, Forfar, Fife, Ayrshire, and the South-West in general, during the years 1910-12, is provided in Hall, A.D., *A pilgrimage of British agriculture*, pp.131-137 and 377-406.

³ Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers*, pt.II.

widespread, except in the North-East where cattle were the main rotation livestock, the Borders demonstrating its specialisation in sheep raising and breeding.

Most Scottish farms were quite small; farms below 50 acres represented 52.2% of holdings in lowland counties in 1908, only 5.1% were above 300 acres. Farm size tended to follow regional production patterns and physical geography. The largest (Table 3) were in the highly capitalised, arable/livestock farms of the South-East (Berwick and East Lothian) - the 'East Anglia' of Scottish farming. Farms below 50 acres predominated in the North East, where family farms and 'crofts' provided the backbone of small-scale oats production and cattle breeding. The rest of the lowland counties had average farm sizes of between 70 and 130 acres (exceptions being the sheep/arable counties of Roxburgh and Peebles)¹.

The chronological trends within lowland Scottish agriculture during the early twentieth century were a continuation of those that had occurred in the late nineteenth century (see Table 4). There was little change in the importance of the major crops, except for a slight switch away from turnips to potatoes², and a gradual move out of rotation grass and into permanent pasture. Strategies which were designed specifically to cut costs (particularly labour), indicating the continued financial pressure under which most of the industry worked. The increase in rough grazing was also a definite trend, though there were fluctuations across individual years; the actual acreage fell by some 18,000 acres between 1900 and 1908, and then rose by 40,000 acres between 1908 and 1914.

¹ The farm sizes given are for cultivated land only; as noted some counties had very large acreages of rough grazing and therefore actual operational farm size has been significantly underestimated in these. Taking average farm size is often a rather simple indicator of the distribution of holding size, those who wish for more detailed information should consult the annual Agricultural Statistics and *Occupiers of farms (Scotland)* (P.P. 1907, LXXIII, Cd.127) which is based on information from the Valuation Roll. For a historical discussion of farm size see Grigg, D., 'Farm size in England and Wales, from early Victorian times to the present' *Agricultural History Review*, 35 (1987), pp.179-189.

² Whitby, H., 'Some changes in the structure', p.319.

Table 3: Cropping patterns and livestock numbers per 100 acres of cultivated land, by county, 1908

	Arable	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Potatoes	Turnips	Rotation Grass	Permanent Grass
Aberdeen	94.4	0.0	3.2	29.9	1.2	13.8	45.5	5.6
Ayr	50.0	0.3	0.2	13.4	3.0	2.0	30.2	50.0
Banff	94.2	0.0	5.0	30.5	1.3	13.4	43.2	5.8
Bervick	74.0	0.9	9.8	16.4	1.3	13.3	31.0	26.0
Clackmannan	60.8	1.5	2.0	19.9	2.6	4.9	24.5	39.2
Dumbarton	56.2	1.0	0.1	14.0	4.7	2.7	32.3	43.8
Dumfries	51.8	0.0	0.2	16.0	1.4	6.7	26.9	48.2
East Lothian	81.9	4.1	13.6	14.9	8.0	13.3	25.8	18.1
Fife	69.8	3.6	7.9	15.2	6.6	9.0	25.7	30.2
Forfar	89.2	3.1	11.0	19.5	6.6	13.2	34.7	10.8
Kincardine	90.4	0.5	10.3	22.3	2.9	14.0	39.6	9.6
Kinross	62.3	0.2	1.0	17.2	2.2	7.1	33.7	37.7
Kirkcudbright	46.9	0.0	0.0	13.2	0.8	5.9	26.1	53.1
Lanark	55.4	0.7	0.1	14.5	2.0	3.7	32.3	44.6
Midlothian	63.7	3.9	4.0	17.0	5.5	8.2	23.1	36.3
Peebles	65.7	0.0	0.7	14.1	0.8	7.3	41.4	34.3
Perth	67.5	1.3	3.1	19.8	4.3	8.0	28.9	32.5
Renfrew	48.5	1.6	0.0	11.5	3.3	2.3	28.5	51.5
Roxburgh	61.1	0.2	6.2	15.0	0.7	11.2	26.9	38.9
Selkirk	54.3	0.0	0.9	15.9	0.7	8.6	27.5	45.7
Stirling	53.5	1.2	1.9	15.4	2.8	3.4	25.0	46.5
West Lothian	59.7	2.8	4.3	17.4	4.1	6.0	23.4	40.3
Wigtown	76.2	0.1	0.4	20.1	0.9	9.3	44.7	23.8
Lowland Scotland	70.2	1.0	3.9	19.0	2.9	9.0	33.0	29.8

	Dairy Cattle	Other Cattle	All Cattle	Sheep ^a	Pigs	Rough Grazing	Land held by tenants	Ave. size of holding
Aberdeen	6.7	19.9	2.6	32.7	2.2	25.0	92.6	56.5
Ayr	16.4	14.9	31.3	57.8	4.4	102.9	91.8	95.8
Banff	7.9	19.3	27.2	32.2	2.3	32.3	90.4	45.7
Berwick	1.5	7.8	9.3	127.9	2.1	37.0	88.5	216.6
Clackmannan	9.1	13.2	22.3	56.9	6.0	77.0	84.2	69.1
Dumbarton	17.3	11.4	28.7	59.4	2.5	159.9	86.3	76.7
Dumfries	8.4	16.1	24.5	91.2	3.6	146.4	87.9	94.1
East Lothian	1.8	8.8	10.6	93.0	1.7	35.0	86.2	201.5
Fife	4.8	13.4	18.2	49.6	2.3	4.0	80.0	112.2
Forfar	4.7	14.5	19.3	41.7	2.8	72.7	88.7	95.0
Kincardine	5.5	14.2	19.7	32.2	2.4	41.3	89.3	73.7
Kinross	4.0	14.3	18.3	81.7	2.0	32.2	68.8	115.6
Kirkcudbright	9.2	17.5	26.7	77.8	5.2	175.8	89.1	117.3
Lanark	15.3	12.7	28.0	55.7	2.8	80.9	85.9	86.4
Midlothian	9.2	5.9	15.1	95.0	6.9	58.2	85.6	123.6
Peebles	4.1	10.3	14.4	98.0	1.2	323.6	85.1	150.8
Perth	5.1	15.9	21.0	58.0	2.2	259.4	82.5	78.5
Renfrew	18.6	9.1	27.8	34.5	1.6	40.4	85.2	84.3
Roxburgh	2.6	7.5	10.1	137.0	1.8	122.9	87.8	138.6
Selkirk	4.4	7.0	11.4	112.4	1.5	470.3	87.0	125.7
Stirling	10.1	16.1	26.2	52.4	1.7	114.7	83.7	76.7
West Lothian	8.7	10.8	19.5	42.3	2.5	4.9	89.4	120.2
Wigtown	16.4	17.7	34.1	48.1	9.0	74.0	94.9	113.4
Lowland Scotland	8.2	14.5	22.8	66.5	3.1	92.1	87.9	86.5

Note: a Sheep = numbers per 100 acres of cultivated land and rough grazing
Source: Agricultural statistics, 1908

Table 4: Cropping patterns and livestock numbers per 100 acres of cultivated land, lowland Scotland, 1900, 1908 and 1914

	1900	1908	1914
Arable	72.1	70.2	68.8
Wheat	1.2	1.0	1.5
Barley	4.8	3.9	4.0
Oats	18.9	19.0	18.6
Potatoes	2.5	2.9	3.2
Turnips	9.5	9.0	8.9
Rotation Grass	33.9	33.0	31.4
Permanent Grass	27.9	29.8	31.2
Cattle	23.1	22.8	24.1
Sheep	63.1	66.5	62.5
Pigs	2.5	3.1	3.4
Rough Grazing	91.9	92.1	94.2

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1900, 1908 and 1914

The First World War ushered in a dramatic change in the market position facing Scottish agriculture¹. Inevitably Scottish farmers altered their cropping practices in reaction to changing market conditions, a position further enhanced by the increased intervention of the state. However, there were no major changes in the patterns of production during the first two years of the war². Table 5 shows the cultivation patterns for lowland Scotland during the period 1915-20.

During the period 1914-16 the only noticeable alteration was an increase in the acreage of oats, and this was primarily at the expense of root crops (particularly potatoes), a policy resulting in reduced labour requirements, but also declining soil fertility³. There was little change in the overall importance of grass, either permanent or temporary. It was only during the last two years of the war that any significant shift to cereal production occurred, the primary

¹ Conacher, H.M, 'Scottish agriculture, with special reference to food production' in D.T.Jones, J.F.Duncan, H.M.Conacher and W.R.Scott, *Rural Scotland during the war* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1926), pp.137-138.

² Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, ch.7.

³ *ibid*, pp.80-81.

gainers being oats and potatoes, with farmers moving out of temporary and permanent grass.

Table 5: Crops and livestock per 100 acres of cultivated land, lowland Scotland, 1915-20

	1915	1916	1917	1918	1920
Arable	68.8	69.0	70.2	72.4	71.2
Wheat	1.9	1.5	1.5	1.9	1.4
Barley	3.0	3.5	3.3	3.1	4.3
Oats	20.0	20.3	21.3	25.8	21.4
Potatoes	3.0	2.7	3.0	3.5	3.5
Turnips	8.7	8.5	8.6	8.2	8.9
Rotation Grass	30.9	31.3	31.6	28.7	30.5
Permanent Grass	31.2	31.0	29.8	27.6	28.8
Cattle	24.4	24.5	24.0	24.2	23.3
Sheep	62.7	62.6	60.5	59.8	54.6
Rough Grazing	94.6	94.9	95.8	97.5	99.0

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1915-20

In percentage terms the increase in tillage was less in Scotland than the rest of the U.K., due to the fact that the percentage reduction in corn-growing during the years 1870-1914 had been less in Scotland. Therefore, there was less scope for expanding into suitable cereal-producing areas. In addition, the Scottish emphasis on the use of grass in rotation, rather than as a permanent crop, meant that the ability to expand cereal production without seriously upsetting complex cropping rotations was limited¹. This is demonstrated in the increase in rotation grass after the war and the decline in oats acreage, as Scottish farmers returned to pre-war rotations. Livestock

¹ *ibid*, pp.203-204; Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture during the war' *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*, 31 (1919), p.12; Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', p.132.

numbers were generally unchanged, particularly those of cattle, which were unaffected by the short-term movement in and out of rotation and permanent grass. The position of sheep was somewhat different, numbers fell but by less than in England and Wales¹. There were a number of reasons for this; firstly, much of the decline was due to the harsh winter of 1919, and secondly, during the war it proved cheaper and more profitable to reduce sheep flocks rather than cattle herds as pasture acreage fell².

Table 6: Index of crop production, Scotland, 1914-18

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Wheat	100	116	88	95	126
Barley	100	68	70	76	75
Oats	100	106	98	118	140
Potatoes	100	90	49	103	107
Turnips	100	119	93	128	87
Hay from Ryegrass etc.	100	86	121	104	94
Hay from Permanent Grass	100	92	115	91	85

Source: Douglas, G., 'Scottish agriculture during the war' *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*, 31 (1919), p.48

Actual output of agricultural commodities is more difficult to calculate, Table 8 shows an index for crop output as calculated by Douglas for the whole of Scotland. A major influence was climate, generally 1914 and 1915 were relatively good years, 1916 was poor, and 1917 and 1918 average³. By far the biggest and most consistent increase in output was achieved by oats, a pattern repeated throughout Britain; at the end of the day Britain and Scotland proved more able to expand their production of home-grown

¹ Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', p.157.

² *ibid*, pp.149, 159-160.

³ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.36-37.

animal feed rather than the wheat required for human consumption¹. The output of livestock, despite the general maintenance in numbers, fell consistently throughout the war. Both sheep and cattle carcase weights and milk yields declined, a consequence of a scarcity of feedstuffs².

Overall the long term impact of the boom years of 1914-21 was undramatic, and the structure of Scottish agricultural production, while being adjusted at the margins to suit short run price fluctuations, remained remarkably stable³. The increase in tillage during 1918 was a temporary phenomenon, not one that Scottish farmers wished to sustain, nor one that the market would support.

After 1921, Scottish farmers reacted to the general depression in prices as they had done in the late nineteenth century, shifting away from arable crops and into extended rotations and permanent pasture, and focusing on what climatic and topographical features dictated were the most cost-efficient sectors of production. Earlier long-term trends accelerated, with permanent grass and rough grazing acreages outstripping pre-1914 achievements, and a resulting dramatic growth in the sheep, and to a lesser extent the cattle, populations. Contemporaries were clearly aware of the fact that Scottish farmers were merely reacting to long-term changes in the nature of demand for agricultural products⁴. The 1930 Census of Production summarised the situation as follows:

'The total area of land under crops and grass has steadily declined since 1925 and the area in 1931 was the smallest return since 1876, having lost 73,000 acres since 1925. The land under permanent grass has increased by 104,000 acres, and rotation grass by 31,000 acres, while the tillage area has decreased by 208,000 acres. These changes show an acceleration of the tendencies apparent in Scotland since 1876 with the exception of the period 1916-20.

Of the area under crops and grass, permanent grass now accounts for 34.1 per cent. as compared with 31.4 in 1925, and rotation grasses and clover 33.1 per cent. as compared with 31.9 per cent., while the tillage area has fallen from 36.7 per cent. to 32.8 per cent. in the same period. The proportion of arable land under rotation grasses and clover is 50.6%, the largest on

¹ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, p.206.

² Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.154 and 160; *ibid*, pp.214-215.

³ Symon, J.A., *Scottish farming*, pp.220-221.

⁴ Whitby, H., 'Some changes in the structure', p.333; Greig, R. and King, J.S., 'Distribution of live stock in Scotland: fifty years' changes' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 12 (1929), pp.235-251.

record. This reflects the tendency of recent years in Scottish farming practice to adopt long-course rotations.¹

Table 7: Crops and livestock numbers per 100 acres of cultivated land, lowland Scotland, 1921-39

	1921	1928	1931	1935	1939
Arable	70.7	66.6	65.2	64.1	63.7
Wheat	1.6	1.5	1.3	2.5	2.1
Barley	3.5	2.3	1.8	1.5	2.1
Oats	21.0	18.2	17.4	17.4	16.6
Potatoes	3.3	3.1	2.8	2.9	3.1
Turnips	8.6	8.0	7.7	7.6	6.7
Rotation Grass	31.5	32.3	33.1	30.6	31.6
Permanent Grass	29.3	33.4	34.8	35.9	36.3
Cattle	22.9	24.9	25.3	28.2	29.5
Sheep	57.7	68.2	71.6	69.0	71.5
Rough Grazing	99.6	101.5	102.4	110.0	110.2

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1921-39

The reasons behind the decline in arable farming were simple; the First World War had merely been a temporary disruption to the increased penetration by crop imports, particularly wheat, and Britain remained the largest and most open market to world food producers². Looking in detail at the decline, for the 1920s we find that the amount of crops grown fell across the board, whilst rotation grass, permanent grass, rough grazing, cattle and

¹ *The agricultural output of Scotland, 1930* (P.P.1933-4, XXVI, Cd. 4496), p.10. Please note that the figures quoted are for the whole of Scotland. For long-term trends see Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture*, pp.74-83.

² Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture*, pp.70-72; Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation in peace and war* ((George Allen & Unwin, London, 1940), p.27; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, pp.107-108, Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture in Western Europe 1880-1988* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1989), p.149.

sheep all increased (Table 7)¹. During the 1930s the picture becomes more complex; wheat (and later on barley) show a revival, primarily due to government policy, and cattle numbers continued to increase reflecting the prosperity of the dairy sector and the subsidy given to fat cattle in 1934. Sheep numbers, however, stopped growing, a result of the impact of the 1930s depression on wool and lamb/mutton prices, and the delay in the introduction of a fat sheep subsidy until 1939. Rough grazing experienced its greatest growth at the height of the Depression (the early 1930s); from the mid 1930s government support for agricultural production halted the expansion, but its refusal to decline gives the impression of continued financial uncertainty.

During the 1920s and 1930s the first separate statistics for Scottish agricultural output were made available, Table 8 gives a breakdown of the composition. In 1925 livestock products predominated (79.4%), with beef by far the largest component (34.0), of the crops only oats and potatoes were above 5%. By the late 1930s beef production had become noticeably less important falling to around 27%, while lamb exhibited a fluctuating trend through the 1930s. The prime gainers in the livestock sector were milk products (especially during the late 1920s) and poultry, which nearly doubled its percentage between 1925 and 1932/3 and then stabilised at around 7-8%². Oats held up surprisingly well during the early 1930s, reflecting its pre-eminence as a feed crop. Both wheat and barley fell, with the former improving by the mid 1930s as a result of government support. Not to be forgotten must be the growth of fruit and vegetables, as Scotland shared with the rest of Britain in the improvements in market opportunities³.

¹ Scottish National Development Council, *Economic series: no.7, Scottish agriculture. Report of the committee on agriculture in Scotland* (Scottish National Development Council, Glasgow, 1934), pp.14-15.

² The interwar period was probably the first time that poultry emerged as a major sector of production on farms, though the vast majority was small-scale. Disease was partly to blame for the interruption in growth from 1933 onwards; Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture*, pp.92-94; Whitby, H., 'Some changes in the structure', pp.331-332; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, pp.97-99.

³ Robinson, G.M., *Agricultural change: geographical studies of British agriculture* (North British Publishing, Edinburgh, 1988), ch.5; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, pp.99-100

Table 8: Agricultural output, Scotland, 1925-1939 (%)

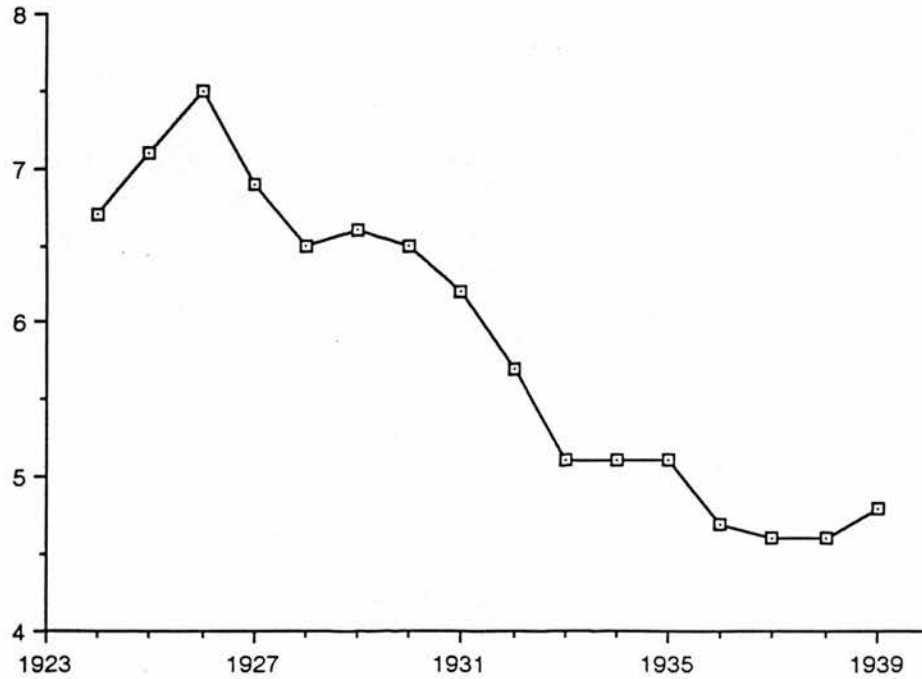
Year	Beef	Lamb	Pork	Milk	Poultry	Wool	All Livestock
1925	34.0	17.0	3.0	18.3	4.6	2.3	79.4
1930-1	32.6	17.5	3.4	19.8	6.4	1.3	81.2
1931-2	30.8	15.0	3.1	20.0	7.5	1.3	77.6
1932-3	31.0	15.8	3.3	22.6	8.7	2.0	83.3
1933-4	29.2	18.3	3.6	22.2	7.9	1.9	83.1
1934-5	29.2	17.4	3.6	21.6	7.0	1.8	80.6
1935-6	27.3	15.2	4.3	21.4	7.3	2.0	77.4
1936-7	26.0	16.7	4.1	20.0	7.7	3.0	77.4
1937-8	27.4	14.5	4.2	21.8	8.4	1.7	78.0
1938-9	27.0	11.0	4.3	25.6	8.4	1.9	79.3

Year	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Potatoes	Hay	All Crops	Fruit and Vegetables
1925	1.1	2.5	5.9	6.4	3.0	18.9	1.6
1930-1	0.6	1.0	4.8	8.6	1.8	16.8	2.0
1931-2	0.6	0.8	5.7	10.8	2.3	20.3	2.1
1932-3	0.8	0.7	6.4	4.4	1.9	14.3	2.4
1933-4	1.1	0.7	5.6	5.2	1.9	14.5	2.3
1934-5	1.3	1.2	5.2	7.0	2.2	17.3	2.1
1935-6	1.6	0.8	4.6	8.4	2.3	18.1	4.6
1936-7	1.7	0.9	5.3	9.3	0.9	18.4	4.2
1937-8	1.7	1.6	5.9	6.4	1.8	17.7	4.3
1938-9	1.8	1.5	6.0	6.2	0.8	17.4	3.4

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1939

Graph 1

Agricultural income as a percentage of Scottish national income, 1924-39



Source: Campbell, A.D., 'Changes in Scottish Income, 1924-49'
Economic Journal, 65 (1955), p.226

In terms of the actual value of Scottish agricultural output, between 1925 and 1931 Scottish output fell slightly while that of England and Wales rose. Part of the explanation lies in changes in measurement, particularly the overvaluation of meat, and a sharper fall in the price level for Scottish agricultural products. However, in the period 1931-39 real output in Scotland continued to perform below that of the rest of Britain, but, during these years, prices and government subsidies were lower in Scotland¹. The agricultural depression of the late 1920s/early 1930s also saw a dramatic fall in agriculture's share of Scottish national income (Graph 1). The position stabilised from the mid 1930s, although much of this may have been due to increased state assistance for agriculture.

¹ Mackay, D., 'Agriculture' (unpublished paper), p.9; Houston, G.F.B., 'Agriculture' in A.K.Cairncross (ed.), *The Scottish economy: a statistical view of Scottish life* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1954), pp.89-91.

Long-term changes also emerge in the structure of landownership in Scotland. At the turn of the century few farmers were owner-occupiers. In 1908 87.9% of the land and 90% of the holdings were in the hands of tenants, only in the small county of Kinross did the percentages fall below 80 (Table 4). During the post war boom there was a notable increase in the proportion of land and holdings held by owner-occupiers (Table 9). Much has been made of the widespread land sales by estates, following the First World War. The economic logic was undeniable; rents had been kept low, the cost of estate maintenance was increasing rapidly, and farmers were more capable and willing to purchase their tenanted farms in a climate of increased profits. Nevertheless, the shift to owner-occupation did not occur all at once, 1919-21 was just one short jump in the move to more complete owner occupation. The vast majority of land remained under the control of landowners¹.

Table 9: Percentage of land and holdings held by owner-occupiers, lowland Scotland, 1914, 1920 and 1921

	Acreage	Holdings
1914	10.9	9.5
1920	12.8	10.5
1921	16.3	13.1

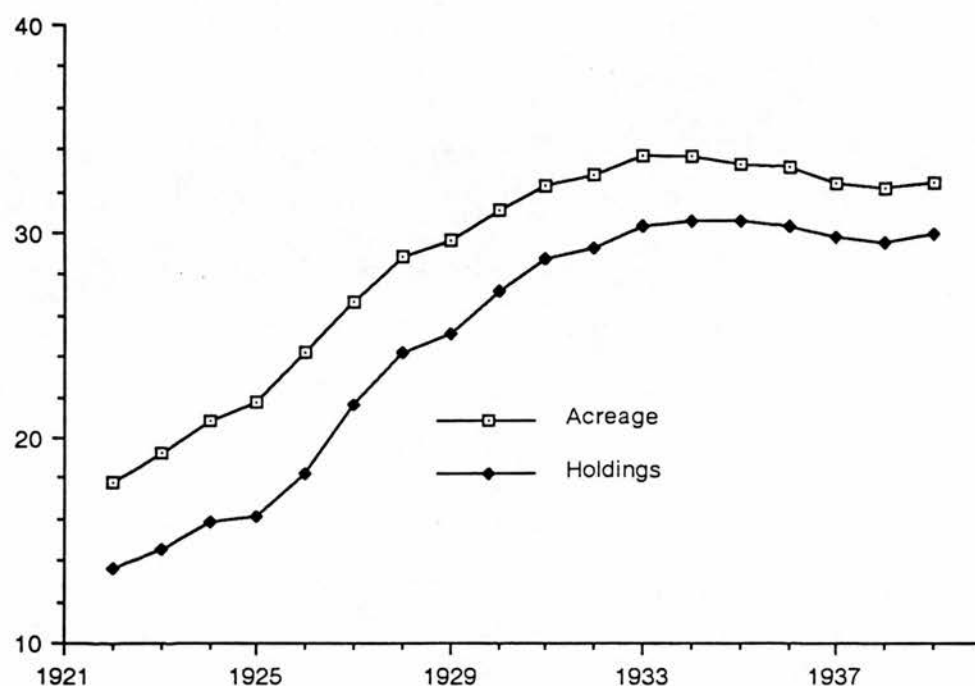
Source: Agricultural statistics, 1914, 1920 and 1921

Note: Statistics for landholding were not collected and/or published for the years 1915-19.

¹ Sturmev, S.G., 'Owner-farming in England and Wales 1900-1950' *Manchester School*, 23 (1955), reprinted in W.E.Minchinton (ed.), *Essays in agrarian history, II* (David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1968), pp.281-306; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', p.319-321; Offer, A., 'Farm tenure and land values in England, c.1750-1950' *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991), p.17. On the position of estates see Thompson, F.M.L., *English landed society in the nineteenth century* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963), pp.329-335; Beard, M., *English landed society in the twentieth century* (Routledge, London, 1989), ch.3.

Graph 2

Percentage of land and holdings farmed by owner-occupiers, lowland Scotland, 1922-39



Source: Agricultural statistics, Scotland, 1922-39

The rising trend of owner-occupancy amongst farmers continued throughout the interwar period. The traditional conclusion has been that the vast majority of land sales had taken place by 1927, and during the 1930s there was little economic incentive for farmers to purchase farms¹. These assumptions have been held in the complete absence of figures for owner-occupancy in England and Wales from 1927 to 1940². In Scotland the collection of owner-occupancy figures continued (see Graph 2), demonstrating that the shift to owner-occupancy, the so-called 'silent revolution of the countryside', was a more gradual process than previously assumed, and continued up to the early 1930s³. Callander concluded that the break-up of estates was assisted by the increase in estate duty from

¹ Sturmev, S.G., 'Owner-farming', pp.301-3; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', p.323; Offer, A., 'Farm tenure and land values', p.17.

² MAF, *Agricultural statistics, 1924*, vol.59, pt.I (HMSO, London, 1924), pp.12-13; *idem, 1927*, vol.62, pt.I (HMSO, London, 1928), pp.27-28; *idem, 1928*, vol.63, pt.I (HMSO, London, 1929), p.30.

³ Campbell, R.H., 'The silent revolution in the countryside' *Scottish Local History*, 24 (1991), pp.4-7.

1925. However, the puzzle remains as to the lack of farm purchasing during the profitable years of the mid-late 1930s, especially since rental income failed to recover whilst farming income rose¹.

Owner-occupiers who had purchased farms during the great land sales of 1919-21, whether voluntarily or not, suffered from the squeeze between the high costs of financing a loan for the purchase and falling agricultural prices². However, as noted, the transition to owner-occupancy was gradual in Scotland and most farmers who purchased their farms during the inter-war years did so after 1921. They, therefore, did not incur the same heavy costs as those who had taken on debt immediately after the war.

¹ Callander, R.F., *A pattern of landownership in Scotland* (Haughead, Finzean, 1987), pp.82-83; Offer, A., 'Farm tenure and land values', p.9.

² MAF, *Report of the committee on the stabilisation of agricultural prices* (HMSO, London, 1925), p.14. See also Scottish Liberal Land Inquiry Committee, *The Scottish countryside. Being the report of the Scottish Liberal Land Inquiry Committee 1927-1928* (Scottish Liberal Federation, Edinburgh, 1928), pp.106-108; Thompson, F.M.L., *English landed society*, p.334; Beard, M., *English landed society*, p.57; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', pp.324-5.

Prices, profits and government policy

a) 1900-1914

In financial terms the period 1900-14 is regarded as one of gradual recovery following the problems experienced during the 1890s¹, a conclusion tied to the general recovery in agricultural prices. The recent production of a series of weighted agricultural price indices by Turner, points to a very gradual recovery in U.K. farm prices between 1896 and 1908, with some acceleration up to 1914². Published indices of individual commodities confirm such a pattern (Table 10), though the rapid recovery of certain products, such as wheat, should be taken in the light of the uneven pattern of price falls during the 1880s-1890s³.

Table 10: Changes in the prices of major agricultural commodities (1894/98 = 100)

	1906/10	1910/14
Wheat	117	125
Wool	125	128
Potatoes	104	108
Barley	104	113
Oats	111	119
Pork	118	123
Beef	116	126
Butter	117	N/A
Mutton	116	120

Source: Layton, W.T., *An introduction to the study of prices* (Macmillan, London, 1914), p.88; Layton, W.T. and Crowther, G., *An introduction to the study of prices* (Macmillan, London, 1935), p.108.

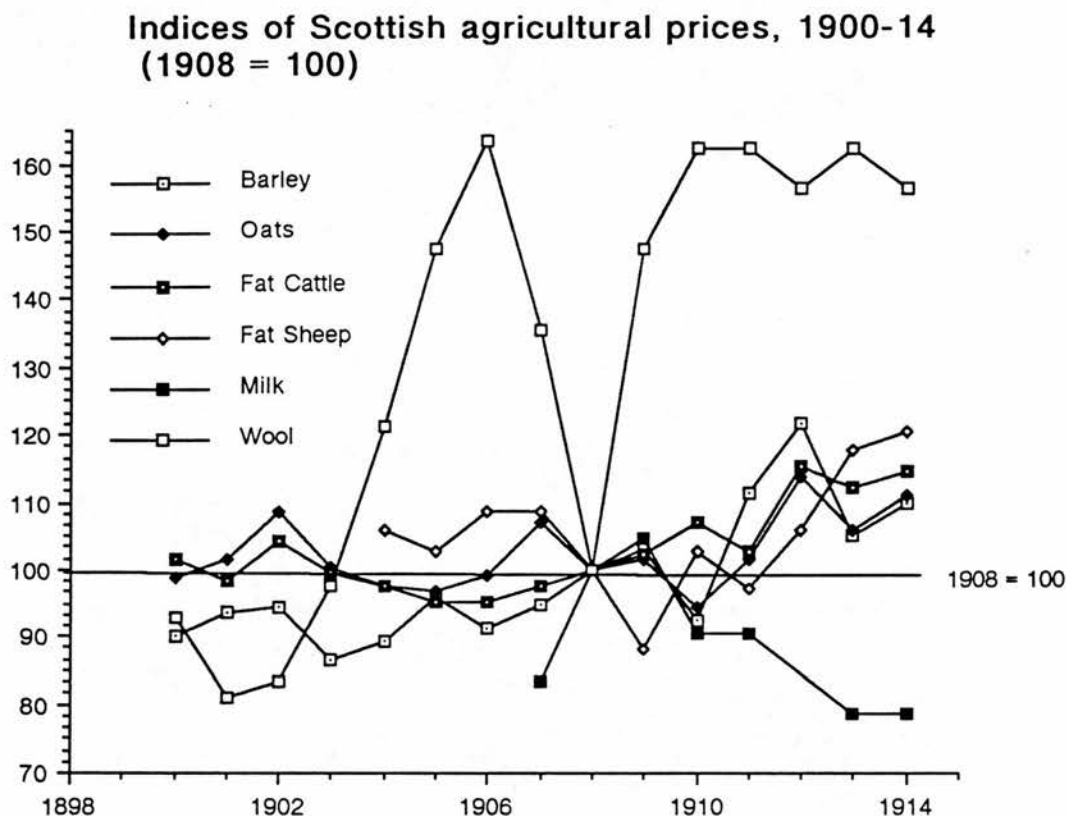
¹ Symon, J., *Scottish farming*, p.204; Perry, P.J., *British agriculture*, pp.xxi-xxii. In Brown's survey of English agricultural history, the years 1900-14 receive almost no attention at all; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*.

² Turner, M., 'Output and prices in UK agriculture', pp.47-48.

³ Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture in Western Europe*, p.43.

From 1909 an 'official' English agricultural price index is available, indicating an approximate 10% rise in agricultural prices from 1909 to 1912¹. An attempt to provide a Scottish series of prices (i.e. prices at Scottish markets) is shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3



Source: See Appendix 1

Of these prices, the most important for Scottish farmers were oats, fat cattle, fat sheep and milk. Overall the graph points to a modest rise in prices, particularly after 1910. The decline in milk prices is rather stark, and maybe partly related to the changing definition offered by the official agricultural statistics. However, the timing of the decline in milk prices coincides with the formation of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland in 1913, whose initial

¹ Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food/Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, *A century of agricultural statistics, 1866-1966* (HMSO, London, 1968), p.85.

aim was to improve the price of milk, and which drew most of its early support from the dairy-producing South-West¹.

As pointed out by Turner and Thompson, increasing prices did not automatically mean improved real farm output or incomes². Following the decline in general price levels in the late nineteenth century, price inflation returned during the 1900s, thus eroding real values and increasing farm costs. Little research has been done on farming incomes for the period since Bellerby's classic study³. Bellerby's figures are for the United Kingdom only, and show that both total factor income and returns to farmers actually fell from 1897/1902 to 1903/05, after which the position of agriculture and farmers improved markedly.

Table 11: Sectoral income in United Kingdom agriculture, 1897-1914 (£ million)

	Total factor income	Net rent	Interest	Wages	'Farmer's incentive income'
1897-1902	115.0	21.8	13.3	42.7	37.2
1903-05	114.9	22.8	14.7	43.7	33.8
1906-10	126.7	24.5	15.2	44.6	42.4
1911-14	143.4	26.5	17.6	47.6	51.7

Source: Bellerby, J.R., *Agriculture and industry: relative income* (Macmillan, London, 1956), p.56

Agricultural income was split three ways; landowners, farmers and workers. Returns to farmers, year in year out, fluctuated (see Table 12). As Offer has concluded, it was the farmer who absorbed fluctuations within farming returns and therefore carried most of the entrepreneurial risk⁴. However,

¹ Interestingly this conflicts with the conclusion of Taylor on the English dairy industry; Taylor, D., 'The English dairy industry, 1860-1930' *Economic History Review*, 29 (1976), pp.590-594. For details of the history of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland see chapter 4.

² Thompson, F.M.L., 'An anatomy of English agriculture, pp.219-220; Turner, M., 'Output and prices in UK agriculture', p.48.

³ Bellerby, J.R., *Agriculture and industry. Relative income* (Macmillan, London, 1956)

⁴ Offer, A., 'Farm tenure and land values, pp.5-9.

despite the annual variations, the farmer's share of total factor income generally rose over the period 1900-14.

Table 12: Farmers' income, United Kingdom, 1900-1914

	£ million	As % of total factor income
1900	33	25.4
1901	33	25.4
1902	40	29.0
1903	30	23.6
1904	30	23.6
1905	34	26.0
1906	40	28.8
1907	41	29.3
1908	46	31.7
1909	37	27.2
1910	35	25.9
1911	51	33.6
1912	46	31.1
1913	39	27.5
1914	67	38.7

Source: Feinstein, C.H., *Statistical tables of national income, expenditure and output of the U.K., 1855-1965* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), Table 23, T60.

For Scottish farmers there are no separate indicators of financial performance. There is a danger of relying on comments made in evidence to the 1893/4 *Royal Commission on Agriculture* , when a somewhat different set of economic circumstances was in place. This fact can be demonstrated with reference to dairy farmers, who appeared to have been least affected by the ravages of depression in the 1890s, but who suffered as prices fell during the 1910s¹. With the lack of general evidence on the financial

¹ *Royal Commission on the agricultural depression. Minutes of evidence, II* (P.P.1894, XVI Pt.II, Cd. 7400-II), p.377; *IV* (P.P.1896, XVII, Cd.8021), p.29-30; *Final report* (P.P.1897, XV, Cd.8450), p.124. See Graph 1 for milk prices.

position of Scottish farmers, the conclusion that must be drawn is that they shared with the rest of Britain in an improvement in fortunes from the mid 1900s onwards.

Those who received their income from land rentals were facing a gradual erosion of financial returns. Rents had generally fallen throughout Scotland during the 1870s to 1890s in reaction to the worsening financial state of the industry, though more so in arable areas¹. However, unlike some areas in England, landlords rarely had trouble finding tenants, indicating a continued level of unsatisfied demand for farms². The financial condition of landowners is a topic that has received considerable attention, the general conclusion being that the early twentieth century was not a prosperous time for them. Not only was rental income under pressure, but there were increases in taxation on unearned income³. Again, direct evidence from Scotland is limited, but points to landowners under pressure. Gross incomes fell, while maintenance expenditure, as a proportion of total rent receipts, rose from 28% to 32%⁴.

The attitude of the state towards agriculture was primarily dominated by the politics of *laissez-faire* and free trade, Britain was the only major European nation not to adopt some sort of protection or financial assistance for its farmers following the fall in agricultural prices in the late nineteenth century⁵. The only effective help given was partial relief for farmers from rates under the 1896 Agricultural Rates Act⁶. In terms of political discussion and legislation, two issues dominated - the rights of tenant farmers, and the provision of smallholdings. The former resulted in a gradual erosion of landowner power, with Acts in 1875, 1883 and 1906, and remained the major political issue within farming throughout the late nineteenth/early twentieth century⁷. The latter was heavily wrapped up in the emotional

¹ *Ibid. Minutes of evidence, IV*, p.530, *Final report* pp.19-21 and 208.

² *Ibid. Final report*, pp.119 and 230.

³ Callander, R.F., *A pattern of landownership in Scotland* (Haghighat, Finzean, 1987), p.81. The classic study remains Thompson, F.M.L., *English landed society*, ch.11; see also Beard, M., *English landed society*, ch.1.

⁴ DOAS, *Scottish farm rents and estate expenditure* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1948), p.23; Callander, R.F., *A pattern of landownership in Scotland*, pp.81-82. For a study of the position of estates in the South-West see Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers*, pt.III.

⁵ Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture*, chs.1-2.

⁶ Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, p.28.

⁷ Kirk, J.H., *The development of agriculture in Germany and the U.K.: 2. UK agricultural policy 1870-1970* (Centre for European Agricultural Studies, Miscellaneous study No.3, Wye College, Ashford, Kent, 1979), pp.6-8.

politics of smallholdings for the 'labouring classes', and, in Scotland, with the rights of crofters. For lowland areas of Britain, the result was the 1892 Smallholdings Act, the 1907 Small Holdings and Allotments Act, and the 1911 Smallholdings (Scotland) Act. Only the 1907 Act created a considerable number of smallholdings, and the overall effect of the production and structure of agriculture was minimal¹.

b) 1914-21

The war and post-war years marked a substantial change in the fortunes of the agricultural community, driven by an increased demand for agricultural products and the resulting rise in prices. The published historical price indices are for England and Wales only, and show a general picture of rapidly increasing prices up to the middle of 1921, with the boom during the war years being led by cereals². No general index of Scottish agricultural prices was calculated until the late 1920s, however, it is possible to obtain the prices for particular products from the annual Agricultural Statistics. Table 13 shows the prices for the major products and also general price movements in England and Wales. Oat prices followed the trend of wheat prices in an increase up to 1920; barley fluctuated on a rising trend. Government policy was less favourable towards barley production and the brewing and distilling industries were restricted in their output throughout the war. Once restrictions were lifted then barley prices shot up as pent-up demand was unleashed.

Potatoes saw a gradual increases in prices during 1914-16. Prices in late 1916 and throughout much of 1917 rose sharply in reaction to the appalling 1916 potato harvest, then dropped rapidly in 1917/18 following the very large 1917 harvest. Fat stock prices also rose throughout most of the war, though behind those of cereals. From 1918, returns were held back by government maximum-price controls, then in 1920 prices jumped when full food decontrol was finally instigated³. Initially milk prices increased at a low

¹ Brown, J., 'Scottish and English land legislation 1905-11' *Scottish Historical Review*, 47 (1968), pp.72-85; Bone, Q., 'Legislation to revive small farming in England 1887-1914' *Agricultural History*, 49 (1975), pp.653-661. The 1907 Act did not apply to Scotland.

² Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food/Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, *A century of agricultural statistics*, pp.82-85.

³ Barnett, L.M., *British food policy during the First World War* (Allen & Unwin, Boston, 1985), p.212.

rate, but from 1916, they accelerated as yields fell, despite government controls. On the other hand, wool was an example of very successful price control. The massive requirements of the military led the government to step in and buy up the whole clip during 1916-18 at fixed maximum prices; this kept prices artificially low, and resulted in the sudden jump in prices with decontrol during 1919-20.

Table 13: Indices of Scottish agricultural prices, 1914-21 (1911-13=100)

	Barley	Oats	Fat Cattle	Fat Sheep	Milk	Wool	Potatoes	England & Wales
1914	91	100	103	113	92	100	107	101
1915	125	140	138	126	100	162	118	127
1916	190	156	157	151	161	133	212	160
1917	215	228	203	187	214	144	246	201
1918	206	227	178	187	278	158	177	232
1919	260	239	193	190	331	302	211	258
1920	314	266	247	255	342	320	260	292
1921	132	143	228	228	300	82	244	219

Source: Calculated from the Agricultural statistics, 1914-21

Note: For details of the calculations of the price indices see Appendix 1

How this affected gross and net returns to Scottish farmers is unclear, particularly given the variance in the position of different regions and individuals. Recent work by Dewey has demonstrated that British farmers saw a significant increase in their profits during the war; figures provided by Feinstein confirm that farmers were taking an increasing share of factor income up to 1918, and, even though the percentage fell 1919-21, it remained above 1914 levels (see Table 14)¹. The perception of contemporaries in Scotland was that cereal producers and hill sheep farmer benefited the most.

¹ Feinstein, C.H., *Statistical tables of national income, expenditure and output of the U.K., 1855-1965* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), Table 23; Dewey, P.E., 'British farming profits and government policy during the First World War' *Economic History Review*, 37 (1984), pp.373-390. Dewey also made calculations for the share of agricultural income between landowners, farmers and workers; Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, p.236.

'While the profits of farming were on the whole increased by the circumstances of the war, the two branches in which this has been most conspicuous have been those of arable cultivation and sheep farming. In both, certainly, price restriction set a limit to profits; but the limit was not a narrow one. The arable farmer no doubt encountered, especially in the later years of the war, great increases in his costs as well as great hindrances in the conduct of his business; but the prices of produce were well in proportion to the costs of production....In the case of the sheep farmer - especially the owner of hill sheep - the main outlay was rent of his land, and this underwent no increase, while the increases in his wage bills and other outlays were probably not such as to make the prices fixed for wool and mutton oppressive in their incidence....'¹

In the beef sector most of the extra profits were passed on to breeders, who were able to take advantage of the reduced supply of foreign store cattle from Canada and Ireland; feeders were squeezed by the increase in the cost of stock². For dairy producers, the benefits of rapidly rising milk prices were cut by the rising costs of feedstuffs and falling yields, and during 1917 they were faced by adverse attempts to control milk prices. Those who were least reliant on hired labour, and who produced a surplus of cows which could be sold to other producers appear to have done quite well; but generally this sector was among the worst hit by wartime fluctuations³.

The outstanding feature of costs was the stability in rents. Dewey estimates that the rent bill for British farmers was £33.5 million in 1914 and £33.4 million in 1918, the long-term nature of tenancy agreements plus the restrictions of the Corn Production Act (1917) making it difficult to institute rent increases⁴. For labour costs, initially wages lagged behind price increases and over the whole period 1914-20 it seems doubtful if Scottish farm workers made any real gains⁵. However, the costs of feedstuffs did increase markedly in the period 1914-17, but this was less likely to affect Scottish farmers since they were more reliant on farm-produced feed under their five-to-seven course rotations⁶. Given that the increase in the price of labour was less in Scotland, and that purchased feedstuffs were less important, the costs base of most Scottish farms did not increase as much as

¹ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', p.39. For sheep farmers see also Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.148-149.

² Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', p.39.

³ *ibid*, pp.38-9; Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.153-154.

⁴ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, p.231.

⁵ See chapter 3.

⁶ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, p.231. The shift towards increased use of home-produced feedstuffs did tend to reduce output; Symon, J.A., *Scottish farming*, pp.218-219.

in England during the war. On the other hand, because Scottish agriculture was more reliant on livestock production and found it more difficult to switch to cereals, the rise in revenues was probably smaller as well, so overall Scottish farmers probably experienced similar profit increases to British farmers in general (Table 14).

Table 14: United Kingdom agricultural income, 1914-21 (£ million, current prices)

	Wages	Rent	Farmers' income	Farmers' income as a % of total factor income
1914	62	44	67	38.7
1915	65	44	79	42.0
1916	64	45	127	53.8
1917	78	46	155	55.6
1918	87	46	173	56.5
1919	122	47	176	51.0
1920 ^a	150	48	197	49.9
	105	40	161	52.6
1921 ^a	106	41	124	45.8

Source: Feinstein, C.H., *Statistical tables of national income, expenditure and output of the U.K., 1855-1965* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), T60 Table 23

Note: ^a For the second row 1920 and the 1921 figures Southern Ireland is excluded.

The post-war period saw significant official interest in farm costs and profits¹. The result was that both the 1919 Royal Commission on Agriculture and the Board of Agriculture for Scotland published the results of small surveys of Scottish farm accounts. The latter show that farms experienced a rapid decline in profits from the year 1919/20 to the year 1920/21, mainly

¹ Whetham, E.H., 'The search for the cost of production, 1914-30' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 23 (1972), pp.201-211.

due to the fall in prices that began in 1921¹. The Royal Commission published limited results for 34 farms in Scotland (and 291 in England and Wales) for the year 1918/19 (Table 15). The sample was heavily biased towards large farms, the average size being 626 acres. Compared to England and Wales, a consistently higher proportion of income was going to the farmer (and his family), and this was primarily at the expense of hired labour. Scottish farmers were almost certainly not paying their workers less (Scotland was noted as a high-paying region in terms of agricultural wages); but they were employing a higher proportion of female labour (see chapter 3) that was substantially cheaper than male. Scottish farmers could also have been making better use of their generally more highly-skilled workers, taking part of the higher productivity gains for themselves².

Table 16: Factor incomes in agriculture, 1918/19 (%)

	Tenant		Owner - Occupier		Home Farms	
	England & Wales	Scotland	England & Wales	Scotland	England & Wales	Scotland
Rent	22	18	19	21	19	20
Wages	44	35	52	42	57	39
Profit	34	47	29	37	24	41

Source: *Royal Commission on agriculture. Evidence, IV* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.445), p.34

Note: Accounts from 301 farmers (who had a total of 325 farms), 269 in England & Wales, and 32 in Scotland. Home farms are those under the direct control of estates.

Many of these changes took place against the background of a radical alteration in government attitudes towards agriculture, particularly after the formation of the Lloyd George administration in December 1916. Those seeking the origins of contemporary agricultural support systems see changes in policy during the First World War as the starting point for future

¹ BOAS, *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland on the financial results on sixty-five farms for the period Martinmas, 1919, to Whitsunday, 1921, and on the cost of production of 1920 crops and of milk* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1922), p.8.

² For similar evidence concerning pre-war northern England see Hunt, E.H., 'Labour productivity in English agriculture, 1850-1914' *Economic History Review*, 20 (1967), pp.280-292.

state intervention¹. As early as 1915, the Milner report on food production in England and Wales advocated a policy of increased corn (particularly wheat) production, supported by the offer of minimum prices to farmers to persuade them to plough up grassland. However, similar committees appointed for Scotland and Ireland came to different conclusions.

'....Both committees were primarily swayed by realistic appraisals of agricultural conditions in their own countries. With 31 per cent. of their grasslands under temporary pasture that could easily be readied for grain and root crops, compared to only 9 per cent. in England, neither country needed to encourage widespread ploughing of permanent pasture. Moreover wheat production was already intensive wherever the soil permitted. The Scottish committee opposed the guarantee for wheat. They felt it would only encourage the sowing of inferior land that was best used for oats. If the state was going to interfere, the Scots preferred help with other problems such as the agricultural labour supply.'²

The 'Wason' committee in Scotland argued that the increases in grain prices were more than enough to encourage Scottish farmers to alter their rotations and replace grass with corn. In fact, the continued specialisation by Scotland in meat and dairy products was regarded as a more effective way of maintaining the food supply; circumstances simply did not justify the state interfering in existing farming systems³. The recommendation for the establishment of local committees to help increase local food production was taken up in September 1915, when the Board of Agriculture for Scotland (BOAS) appointed District Agricultural Committees for each county in Scotland⁴. Overall, the government, in the light of an increased wheat acreage in Britain and a good world harvest, particularly in the U.S.A.,

¹ Attwood, E.A., 'The origins of state support for British agriculture' *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, 31 (1963), pp.138-141; Cox, G., Lowe, P. and Winter, M., 'From state direction to self regulation: the historical development of corporatism in British agriculture' *Policy and Politics*, 14 (1986), p.467; Brown, J., 'The state and agriculture, 1914-72' in G.Jones and M.W.Kirby (eds.), *Competitiveness and the state: government and business in twentieth century Britain* (Manchester University Press, 1991), pp.185-193; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', p.26. For the specific origins of the new policy within the Conservative Party see Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy, 1912-36: a study in Conservative politics* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989), ch.2.

² Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, pp.51-52.

³ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.6-7; Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.164-165.

⁴ *Fourth report on the Board of Agriculture for Scotland for 1915* (P.P.1916, IV, Cd. 8282), p.xxxiv. The conclusions for similar committees in England and Wales is that they were too large and unwealdy to be effective (Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, p.64).

harvest, felt that the food supply situation did not justify significant intervention¹.

A sudden change in policy occurred in late 1916 in reaction to a sharp deterioration in the potential supply of food. The North American wheat harvest was poor, the domestic potato crop fell by 16%, the shipping situation worsened with increased submarine activity, and food prices continued to rise at an alarming rate². In January 1917 a Food Production Department was set up³, and the government also appointed a committee to consider post-war policy for British agriculture. The Selborne committee published its first report in March 1917, advocating a significant extension in arable acreage which could only be achieved by guaranteed minimum prices for farmers⁴. The result was the 1917 Corn Production Act, which guaranteed wheat and oat prices until 1922, gave farm workers a minimum wage, limited rent increases, and provided the state with unprecedented powers to control cultivation in the national interest⁵. At the same time, the government also appointed Agricultural Executive Committees (AECs) to implement the 'plough' policy at county level. The impact of the new policy and the food production campaigns has received considerable attention elsewhere, the focus here shall be its specific reference to Scotland⁶.

In Scotland all the new powers were vested in the BOAS, whereas in England they had been split between the Food Production Department, the Board of Agriculture and the AECs. However, the result in administrative terms was not significantly different, especially since the Board left the AECs to get on with the work of encouraging farms to increase corn production⁷. The plough campaigns of 1917-18 were less successful than was claimed at the time, though there was some increase in corn acreage, notably of oats. The activities of the AECs were generally accepted by farmers, who for the

¹ Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, pp.56-57.

² Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, pp.31-32.

³ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, p.31.

⁴ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, pp.85-86.

⁵ For details of this milestone in agricultural history see Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, pp.93-96; Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, pp.94-7; Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, pp.195-198.

⁶ Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, ch.8; Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, ch.7; Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, chs.8 and 12-13.

⁷ Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', p.168; Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.16-17 and 35.

most part co-operated with the demands of the state¹. The BOAS only exercised its powers of compulsory cultivation on 153 occasions in 1917-18²; 83 orders were issued allowing the Board to take actual possession of land, but out of the 69,559 acres involved only 3,171 was land for the cultivation of crops, the rest being the seizure of grass parks and deer forests for grazing³. Criticisms of the Board were surprisingly rare, though there was some feeling that it failed to listen to farmers enough and tended to rely exclusively on the advice of its own officials⁴.

More serious in its implications was state intervention to control prices. This was not under the direction of the BOAS, but of the Ministry of Food (specifically the Food Controller), which was placed in a more powerful political position than the various Boards of Agriculture⁵. A series of maximum price controls was introduced in order to reduce the impact of rising prices on the general population (cereals April 1917, potatoes January 1917, meat August 1917, cheese August 1917, milk November 1916/September 1917, butter October 1917⁶). Consequently, the problem remained that of a general tendency for food pricing policy to favour consumers over producers⁷.

In the light of such a policy, a number of serious errors were made. In the autumn of 1917 a sliding scale of meat prices was announced as part of an effort to reduce prices in the shops. Farmers reacted by bringing to market a large number of immature cattle and sheep for slaughter; the result was a glut of supplies during the autumn of 1917, followed by a shortage⁸. Similarly, in 1917 the government announced that it was going to introduce guaranteed prices for potatoes in order to boost production following the

¹ For a short guide to the powers of the various local agricultural committees formed between 1917 and 1923 see S.R.O., AF 43/511, *Scottish Council of Agriculture. Minutes of meetings, 1922-3*, Memo 'Formation and duties of Agricultural Committees in Scotland'.

² *Sixth report of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland for 1917* (P.P.1918, V, Cd.9069), p.xxxii; *Seventh report of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland for 1918* (P.P.1919, IX, Cd.185), pp.xli-xlii.

³ SRO, AF 43/133, *Royal commission on agricultural policy 1919-26*, tables of statements supplementary to evidence given before the Royal Commission on agriculture on 6th August 1919, Table XIV.

⁴ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.21-22.

⁵ Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, p.193. There were three Boards of Agriculture; the BOAS, the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (England and Wales), and the Board of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland).

⁶ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', p.29.

⁷ Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', pp.159-160.

⁸ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', p.25; Conacher, H.M., 'Scottish agriculture', p.159-160; Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, p.109; Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, pp.140-141; Copper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, p.34.



appalling 1916 harvest. However, the introduction of such guarantees was withheld until a large number of producers had sold their crop at a low price as a result of the bumper 1917 harvest, and many farmers regarded this as a 'breach of faith'¹. In the case of milk, the initial attempt at price controls in November 1916 proved unworkable, and controls had to be re-introduced in September 1917; even then it was difficult to relate maximum prices to the potential cost of production on which the state had little information². Such interference in the operation of the price mechanism made it more difficult for farmers to plan for the financial implications of production, and clearly the Ministry of Food went through a rather painful learning experience in terms of the dynamics of agricultural commodity markets³. However, the general conclusion is that the control of prices, while limiting farmers' profits, did not markedly impede production.

'On the whole, it must be recognised that the Ministry of Food was not unsuccessful in arriving at such scales of prices as enabled production to be carried on, and protecting the consumer against excessive changes caused by scarcity. Producers, no doubt, viewed with natural dissatisfaction the arrangement by which, for example, grain merchants were able to purchase Scottish oats at prices much below those paid for inferior imported oats, and afterwards to sell Scottish and imported together at the higher price allowed for the latter. On the other hand, they did not find it unprofitable to produce oats at the permitted price....but what is really important is that...the agricultural industry retained so large a degree of prosperity of productive vitality under a control which kept prices to the consumer below the levels to which they had risen in every other country.'⁴

State policy also attempted to replace lost labour supplies through the introduction of new technology. The Food Production Department had high hopes that mechanisation of British agriculture would prove a dramatic boost to production. However, the failure of many of the tractor imports to materialise until 1918, plus problems in the application of American models to British conditions, meant that their impact was limited⁵. In 1917 the Department estimated that there were 3500 privately owned tractors and 1500 government tractors in the U.K., but these remained far outnumbered

¹ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', p.27.

² *Ibid*, pp.29-31.

³ Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, pp.118-120.

⁴ Douglas, C., 'Scottish agriculture', p.32. Dewey found that the growth in farmer income declined during 1917-18 as a result of price controls, Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, pp.230-232.

⁵ Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, pp.199-200; Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, p.155.

by horses¹. The number of tractors in Scotland is unclear, the BOAS reported supplying 162 during 1917 and 198 in 1918² (in 1917 there were 135,418 agricultural horses in Scotland). The government tractors were mostly sold off in 1919, and the general conclusion has been that most were abandoned within a few years due to their impracticability for British conditions, and their general unreliability and lack of spares³.

Post-war agricultural policy saw a revival in land settlement schemes and a commitment to support for corn production, and it is with the latter that lowland Scotland was primarily concerned⁴. Policy during 1919-20 consisted of two major features, the gradual dismantlement of food price controls and the state's commitment to price support for arable production. Food price decontrol was considered immediately hostilities ended, and the process was quite rapid; but controls were re-introduced in September 1919 in reaction to a sudden rise in food prices, and final dismantlement did not occur until November 1920. The result was that domestic food controls lasted much longer than other economic regulations⁵.

The impact of these controls on farmers in the post-war period was probably not too significant. Agricultural historians have concentrated on the government's continuing commitment to the provisions of the Corn Production Act, a policy that was reiterated with the passing of the 1920 Agriculture Act. The sudden *volte-face* by the state in 1921 when, in the light of the potential financial burden as commodity prices suddenly fell, it repealed most of the clauses of the two acts, in particular those related to price support and wage regulation, has been deemed as a 'Great Betrayal' by agricultural historians ever since⁶. Such a view has recently been questioned by Cooper, who argued that the government was never sincerely committed to long-term support for the agricultural industry, and that farmers were among the strongest proponents of decontrol. Debates amongst the politicians reveal that the government was aware of the potential cost of its

¹ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, pp.60-62.

² *Sixth report of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland*, p.xxxiv; *Seventh report of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland*, p.xlvi. In 1918 the BOAS estimated that its tractors ploughed 17,000 acres.

³ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, p.127.

⁴ For land settlement see Leneman, L., 'Land settlement in Scotland after World War 1' *Agricultural History Review*, 37 (1989), pp.52-64; *idem*, *Fit for heroes?: land settlement in Scotland after World War 1* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1989).

⁵ Barnett, L.M., *British food policy*, pp.210-213.

⁶ Symon, J.A., *Scottish farming*, p.226; Whetham, E.H., 'The Agriculture Act, 1920, and its repeal - the "Great Betrayal"' *Agricultural History Review*, 22 (1974), pp.36-49.

commitments, and in 1919 it was using vague promises, plus the Royal Commission on Agriculture, as a method of incorporating producer interest groups into the consultation process and reducing political tension. In 1920 the Cabinet finally committed itself to the long-term extension of price support in the Agriculture Act, only because it was led to believe that there would be continued world grain shortages and no likelihood of a fall in prices¹. For farmers decontrol could never come soon enough².

Evidence from Scotland suggests that farmers were only willing to accept price support and potential intervention on their methods of cultivation³, if these were backed by a firm commitment by the state that the national interest would be served by a long-term increase in the corn acreage; in the absence of such a commitment they felt farmers should be left alone⁴. When repeal of the Acts occurred in 1921, the government went out of its way to consult with Scottish agricultural interests, and the National Farmers' Union of Scotland (NFUS) appears to have been satisfied with the compensation offered (subsidies for the 1921 crop of £4 per acre of oats and £3 per acre of wheat which amounted to £4.2 million, and a quarter of a million pounds for future research and education)⁵. The *Scottish Farmer* condemned government policy, both in terms of its content and lack of consistency.

'It is a bad job, and the repeal of the Corn Production Act is not the worst part of the effects of the change of front on the part of the Government. In so far as Scotland and the saner part of the farmers of England made their opinions known, the Corn Production Act and all that it connotes and involves, were never asked for. Men who tried to think were well assured that the policy of guarantees was unsound. Of necessity it made agriculture a privileged industry, and therefore a target for the envy and

¹ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, ch.3.

² *ibid*, pp.37 and 43-45.

³ Both the CPA and the Agriculture Act contained clauses that enabled the state, or representatives of the state through the BOAS and the District AECs, to intervene in cultivation if the farmer was considered to be adopting inefficient cultivation methods.

⁴ *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence, IV* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.445), pp.7 and 48. See also the comments in the *Interim report* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.479), p.6. A contemporary review of the policy behind the Agriculture Act is given by Douglas ('The policy of the Agriculture Act' *Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*, 33 (1921), pp.1-20); this is generally supportive of the policy however even he admits that 'it cannot be too clearly understood that, whatever may be its incidental consequences, the motive and justification of the Act are not to be found in any tendency of its provisions to make farmers or landowners or labourers better off, but only in the increase of agricultural production.' Douglas was a respected member of the agricultural community, a director of the Highland and Agriculture Society, President of the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society, and ex-President of the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture.

⁵ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes 23 June 1921; Symon, J.A, *Scottish farming*, p.226.

contempt of other industries. Furthermore it had too often in the past been proved to be futile. In so far as the insurance analogy holds, a policy of guarantees puts a premium on bad farming. It is inimical to enterprise and initiative; and this is evident enough, even this year, in connection with the subsidies which the Government will be called on to pay in respect of the oat and the wheat crops.¹

c) 1921-39

The period 1921-39 is generally regarded, by British historians, as one of depression, characterised by two main features, declining returns to farmers, and a reversal of state policy away from *laissez-faire* towards direct subsidisation of food production². Scottish farming undoubtedly shared these experiences. However, its different production structure resulted in a somewhat altered impact for both falling agricultural prices and increased government support.

The general depressed nature of the market for agricultural products is directly reflected in the patterns for agricultural prices. A Scottish agricultural price index was published only from 1927 onwards. Nevertheless, it has been possible to extend these price indices backwards to 1922, and calculate a general price index for the same period (using the 1927-9 product weightings and data provided in the agricultural statistics)³. Graphs 4 and 5 show the pattern of the prices most important to Scottish farmers; the overall impression being of a continual downward trend. A number of more specific points can be made; the returns from potatoes remained highly variable linked almost entirely to fluctuations in yield⁴, and oat prices were below that of the general index exhibiting a particularly marked fall during the years 1928-30. The fat sheep price experienced the most dramatic fall, from 125 in 1922 to 60 in 1932. The decline of fat cattle returns was more gradual, whilst milk was by far the most stable commodity, having a maximum of 104 (1925) and a minimum of 80 (1932-3).

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 3 September 1921, p.1023 - editorial 'Policy or No Policy'.

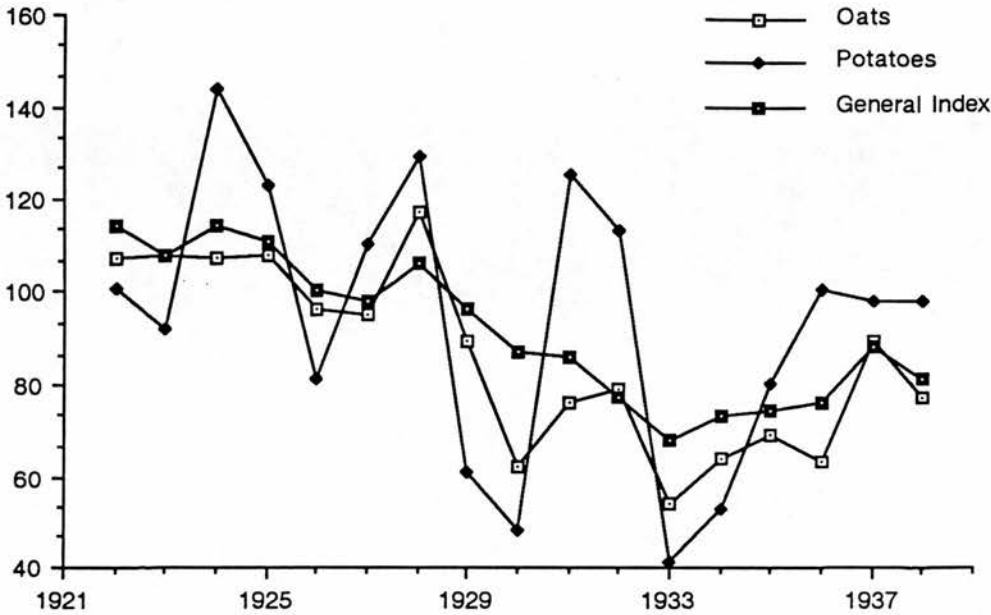
² Murray, K.A.H., *History of the Second World War: agriculture* (HMSO, London, 1955), ch.2; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, chs.5-6; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', ch.2.

³ For information on the methodology used for these calculations see 'An index number of agricultural prices for Scotland' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 22 (1939), pp.253-260.

⁴ Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, p.428.

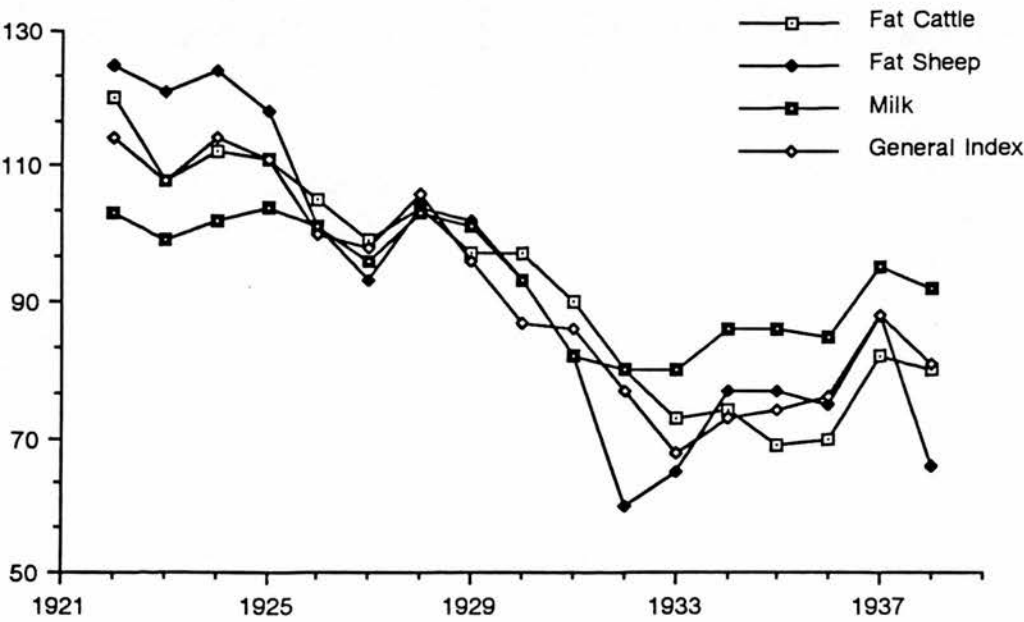
Graph 4

Price indices of oats and potatoes, and general index, 1922-38 (1927-9=100)



Graph 5

Price indices of fat cattle & sheep, milk, and general index, 1922-38 (1927-9=100)



Also deserving mention, though unmarked on the graphs, is the price index for wool, which declined cataclysmically during the early 1930s (1929, 91; 1932, 34).

Exactly how these trends affected the financial position of Scottish farmers is difficult to gauge, particularly given the variety of individual circumstances. For the 1920s there is a paucity of available data. The general pattern for England and Wales was of falling general farm incomes to 1927, followed by a recovery until 1930¹. Both Brown and Whetham have concluded that livestock production was generally more profitable than arable farming, mainly because livestock product prices remained above those for cereals, while lower cereal prices also meant lower feed costs for livestock farmers². As for dairy producers, the 1920s continued to see them as the most consistently profitable sector of the industry, especially given the general stability of milk prices, a position most beneficial for the South-West³. The one major factor that Scottish farmers did not have to contend with was a Wages Board, which has been identified as a source of rising costs for English farmers⁴.

However, for the 1930s, there is a disproportionate amount of information on both costs and profits. During the farming year 1928/9 the three agricultural colleges in Scotland began to collect farm accounts on behalf of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland (DOAS) as part of a scheme to increase the provision of information on the financial standing of farming, and from 1931 onwards the Department published the results of these surveys on an annual basis⁵. Returning to the issue of labour, Graph 6 shows the results of calculations of the importance of labour costs to farmers in different regions of Scotland during the 1930s. Particularly noticeable is the general ability of farmers to reduce labour costs from above to below 20% of the total between 1930-4 and 1935-8, with the critical turning point being 1934/5. This reduction was almost certainly achieved because Scottish agriculture was not under a regime of statutory wage regulation,

¹ Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', pp.381-382.

² Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, p.148; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, pp.81-88.

³ Greig, R. and King, J.S., 'Distribution of live stock', p.247; Taylor, D., "The English dairy industry", p.594.

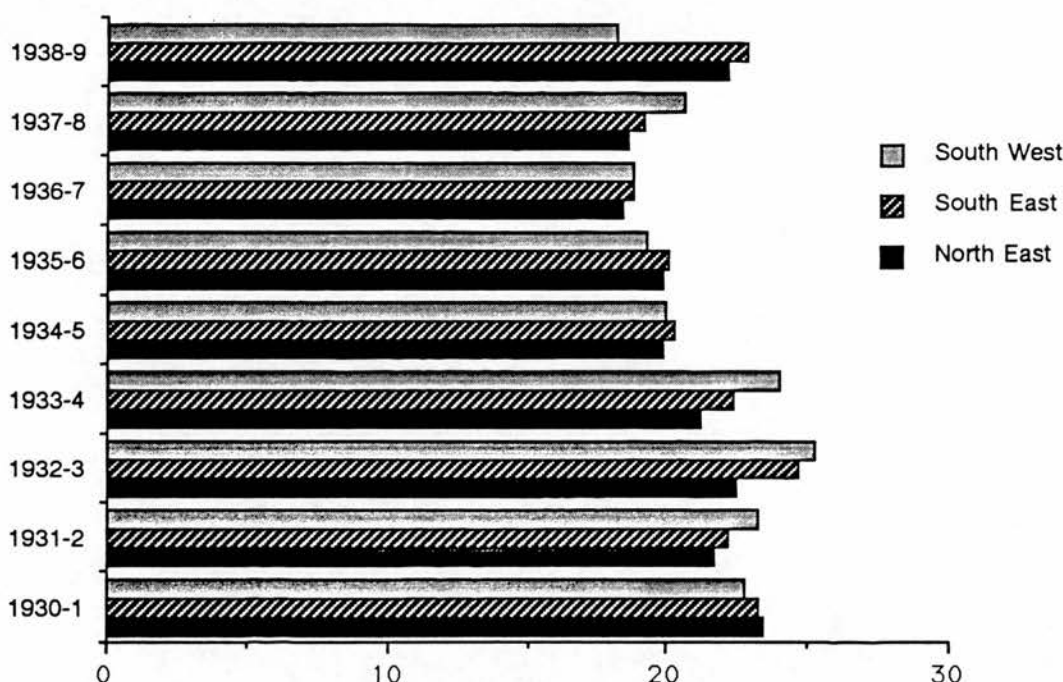
⁴ Venn, J.A., *The foundations of agricultural economics together with an economic history of British agriculture during and after the Great War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1933), pp.249-250; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, pp.83-84; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', pp.378-379.

⁵ King, J.S., 'Agricultural economics investigations in Scotland' *Journal of Farm Economics*, 12 (1930), pp.258-269.

and the result was that the rapid decline exhibited for the numbers of farm workers in England was not repeated in Scotland. In the latter case, labour costs were reduced by cutting wages, in combination with limited reductions in the size of the labour force¹.

Graph 6

Labour as a percentage of total costs, by region, 1930-9



Source: Department of Agriculture for Scotland, Reports on the profitability of farming in Scotland, 1930/1-38/9 (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1931-46)

The surveys provide a wealth of information on the profits and rates of return on capital received by farmers, by region and type of farm, over the period 1928/9-38/9, and the results are outlined in Tables 16 and 17. A number of important trends emerge from this unique source of information. To begin with, most Scottish farms made some sort of profit through most of the 1930s. Perhaps there has been a danger of painting the decade as one of complete doom and gloom, only in 1930/1 and 1932/3 did more than half

¹ Armstrong, A., *Farmworkers: a social and economic history 1770-1980* (Batsford, London, 1988), p.175; Anthony, R., 'The Scottish agricultural labour market, 1900-1939: a case of institutional intervention' *Economic History Review*, 46 (1993), pp.568-569.

of the farms surveyed record a loss¹. Hardest hit were the semi-arable sheep farmers, primarily located in the Border/South-East region, with 1931-2 being an especially bad year, although this sector shared in the general improvement in conditions during the period 1932/3-1936/7². The arable and cattle sectors suffered generally thin periods during the early 1930s, though losses were never particularly heavy (except for arable farms in 1932/3); and both were moderately profitable by 1934/5. Nevertheless, it was the dairy sector that was by far the most successful, in terms of profits and rates of return, the resulting benefits going mainly to the South-West.

Table 16: Profits (£) and rates of return on tenant's capital (%) on Scottish farms, by region, 1928/29-1938/39

	North -East		East/ S.East		Border		South -West	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
1928-29	218		197		206		338	
1929-30	150	4.7	-135	-1.4	283	4.7	263	12.1
1930-31	-65	-1.2	87	1.6	-132	-1.5	155	8.6
1931-32	10	1.7	299	6.6	-819	-13.8	218	10.0
1932-33	-19	-0.3	-370	-5.7	-325	-5.8	150	7.1
1933-34	161	7.0	88	3.0	-83	-0.9	316	15.8
1934-35	260	9.5	325	10.8	249	6.9	389	20.8
1935-36	371	13.8	443	20.0	469	10.6	460	21.6
1936-37	498	16.6	623	20.5			540	23.8
1937-38	488	15.6	261	7.8			269	14.4
1938-39	202	7.9	125	5.5			353	20.5

Source: Calculated from DOAS, *Reports on the profitability of farming in Scotland, 1928/9-1936/7* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1931-38) and *Scottish farming: economic reports, 1937/8-1940/1* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1939 and 1946)

Note: In 1936-7 'Border' and 'East' were combined into 'South-East'

¹ Senior, W.H., 'The recent depression in Scottish agriculture', *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 5 (1938), p.160. This article gives a useful summary of the economic position of Scottish agriculture with reference to the account surveys for the period 1928/9-1935/6.

² This challenges the assumption made by Webber that sheep farmers were generally better-off than beef producers in the 1930s, Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', p.309.

As far as providing the farmer with a reasonable return on his labour, for 1928/9 the Report concluded that 'it is only on dairy farms in the South-West Area that the average "labour income" [to the farmers] might be considered reasonably adequate by a proportion of the farmers engaged.'¹

Table 17: Profits (£) and rates of return on tenant's capital (%) on Scottish farms, by type, 1928/29-1938/39

	Arable		Cattle		Sheep		Dairy	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
1928-29	197		218		206		338	
1929-30	-97	-0.8	151	4.7	283	4.7	243	10.9
1930-31	115	1.9	-111	-2.7	-132	-1.5	170	8.6
1931-32	162	2.9	10	0.9	-819	-13.8	194	9.8
1932-33	-381	-5.9	-40	-1.0	-325	-5.8	163	7.5
1933-34	92	2.8	123	7.3	-21	0.8	351	16.0
1934-35	384	10.7	241	10.1	196	5.6	412	20.4
1935-36	618	15.8	303	11.6	450	10.5	474	23.2
1936-37	847	21.3	463	15.8	573	12.1	537	25.4
1937-38	227	5.9	386	12.2	153	3.2	443	21.6
1938-39	339	3.8	142	5.8	-47	-0.1	355	21.0

Source: see Table 16

Notes: Profit = trading account profit/loss

Rate of return = profit as percentage of tenant's own capital

The reports also comment on the reasons behind the fluctuations in profits from one year to the next. The general fall in profits during the early 1930s was undoubtedly due to the fact that farmers were unable to reduce costs as fast as agricultural prices fell.

'As illustrating the general tendency, it has been said that the farmer in this country has in recent years been between the nether millstone of more or less rigid costs and the upper millstone of declining price for the products he

¹ DOAS, *The profitability of farming in Scotland. Report on the financial results obtained on certain groups of farms in Scotland in 1928-9, with a statistical account of the farms in the counties of Berwick, Roxburgh and Selkirk* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1931), p.54.

has to sell. An examination of the accounting results for 1931-2 only serves to bear this out. It has not been possible for the farmer to lower the level of expenditure to the same extent that income was reduced. Conditions have recently been changing so rapidly and to such a degree that the farmer has been unable in a short period to make the necessary alterations to his practice and management which would tend to nullify the increasingly adverse conditions and permit him to reap the benefit of any advantageous changes. Farm expenditure has necessarily to be incurred on particular sections of the farm business some considerable time before the marketing stage is reached, often twelve months beforehand, and income and expenditure are not nearly so concurrent as in many other industries. In more normal times when prices change more gradually, the farmer is able to some extent to make anticipatory judgements of the market position some time ahead and to modify his expenditure and practice accordingly, but in times when prices are falling rapidly and very unevenly, his position becomes extremely difficult. Any developments in the direction of supplying him with regular accurate information as to the course of future supplies and the probable strength of demand would make him better armed to ward off some of the effects of depression, but a sheep farmer faced with a drop of 40% in store sheep prices in twelve months ahead of him can do very little to ward off trouble.¹

When recovery came in 1934-5, it was linked directly to state intervention and rising consumer demand². However, by the end of the 1930s Scottish farmers were again to be caught in the time lag between the incurring of costs and the returns from prices six or twelve months later, a fact that emphasised the limitations of government assistance at the time³.

There remains the issue of how representative the submitted accounts were. Any agricultural historian would soon point out that those farms furnishing accounts were likely to be the more efficient and profitable. In 1928-9 accounts were collected from 117 farms and this had grown to 272 by 1935-6. The admission was made by contemporary agricultural economists that 'until such time as we could utilise a more scientific basis of selection, the accounting results should only be considered as giving a broad indication of the state of affairs in general.'⁴ However, the farms were selected from throughout lowland Scotland, and represented a variety of different types and sizes of farms from large semi-arable and hill sheep

¹ DOAS, *Fourth report on the profitability of farming in Scotland 1931-2. The financial results obtained on certain groups of farms in Scotland in 1931-2* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1934), p.41.

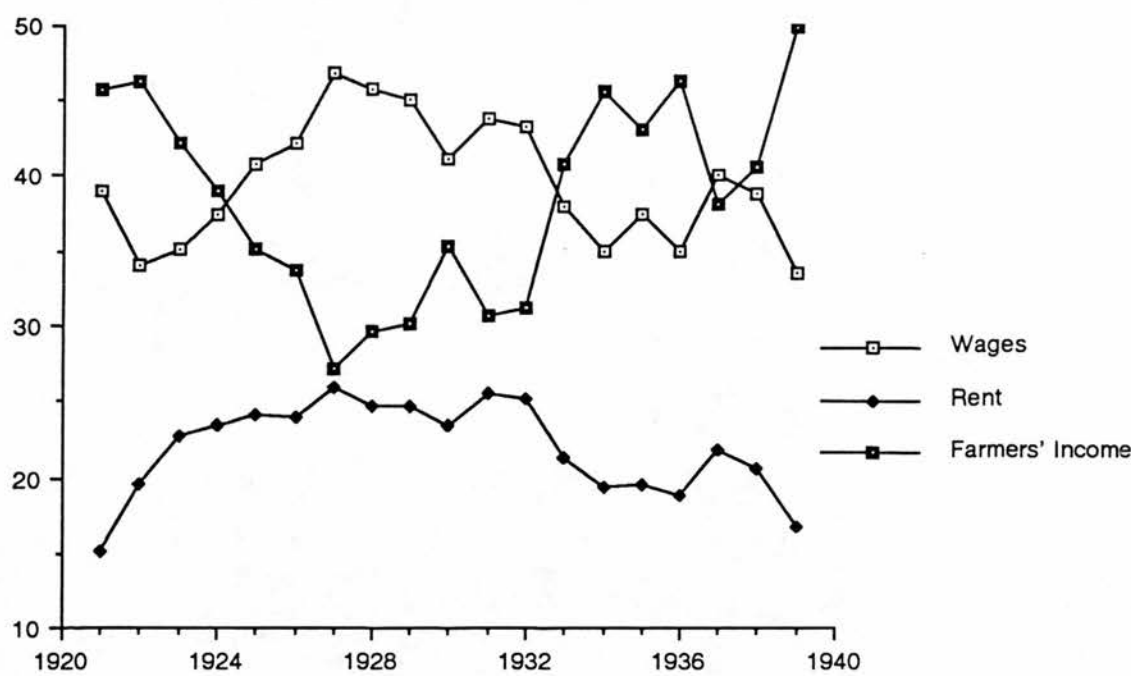
² DOAS, *Seventh report on the profitability of farming in Scotland 1934-5. The financial results obtained on certain groups of Farms in Scotland in 1934-5* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1936), p.37.

³ DOAS, *Scottish farming. Tenth economic report 1937-8* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1939), p.4.

⁴ Senior, W.H., 'The recent depression', p.157 - prologue to the paper.

farms in the Borders, to intensive suburban smallholdings; in 1928-9 there were 10 different groups identified, rising to 18 by 1938-9. It is also clear that the collectors of the accounts, the agricultural economists at the three Scottish agricultural colleges, made considerable efforts to obtain representative samples¹.

Graph 7
Shares in factor income in United Kingdom
agriculture, 1921-39 (%)



Source: Feinstein, C.H., Statistical tables of national income, expenditure and output of the U.K., 1855-1965 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), T60

As regards the division of agricultural income, it is difficult to make comments with specific reference to Scotland. According to Bellerby and Feinstein, farmers' share of total factor income for the United Kingdom fell during most of the 1920s from the rather high levels it had reached during the war. Most of the share was reallocated to labour, and Bellerby considered that British agriculture was verging on the edge on bankruptcy in the 1920s. The recovery during the mid 1930s in the farmers' share of

¹ Senior, W.H., 'The recent depression', p.170.

income, he concluded, was a direct result of government intervention (Graph 7). However, Bellerby regarded the relative change in the position of farmers as far more important, concluding that farmers' had substantially improved their income position compared to non-farm enterprises¹.

Absolute returns from rent had a remarkable tradition of continuity in Scotland, linked primarily to the tradition of long-term leases. This stability in rents enabled Scottish farmers to make high profits during the boom years prior to 1921, surpluses which enabled farmers to sustain themselves during the slumps that followed, particularly that of 1921-3². There remains no index of rents for the whole of Scotland, but Senior published figures for 47 Border semi-arable sheep farms for the period 1911-37. He concluded that rents had remained remarkably static over most of the period with a gradual rise during the 1920s, and then a noticeable decline from an index of 110 in 1930 to 87 in 1937 (1911-12=100). Part of this was due to the abandonment by some landowners of long-lease tenancies, but the general applicability of this index must be questioned given its regional and product concentration³.

Table 18: Estate maintenance expenditure as a proportion of rent, 1900-38

Year	No. of estates surveyed	Total rent roll (£)	Maintenance Expenditure	
			Total (£)	As % of rent
1900	27	252955	71790	28
1914	35	324189	103787	32
1920	41	340604	137569	40
1933	45	341815	148671	43
1938	46	317090	172197	54

Source: DOAS, *Scottish farm rents and estate expenditure* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1948), p.23

A survey of six unidentified parishes published in the *Scottish Journal of Agriculture* concluded that rents had fallen between 4% and 16% over the period 1929/30-1934/35. The survey then went on to examine two 'typical' estates in detail, finding that rental income had fallen by 15% and 10.5%

¹ Bellerby, J.R., *Agriculture and industry*, pp.73-75.

² MAF, *Report of the committee on the stabilisation of agricultural prices*, pp.12-13.

³ Senior, W.H., 'The recent depression', pp.164-165.

respectively, while revenue net of costs had declined by 50-60%¹. A more general review by the Scottish Land and Property Federation supported such conclusions, with net income being hit hard during the 1930s (Table 18).

Uncertain agricultural incomes did not prevent some technological changes; developments that were concentrated on two types of technology, tractors and milking machines. These forms of mechanisation did not become predominant until the 1950s; nevertheless, the introduction of new technologies on a widespread basis was a product of the interwar period².

Table 19: Numbers of tractors in Scotland

	Field	Stationary
1925	1400	291
1931	1782	670
1938	4689	770
1939	6250	N/A

Source: *The agricultural output of Scotland, 1925* (P.P.1928-9, V, Cd.3191), table 26; *The agricultural output of Scotland, 1930* (P.P.1933-4, XXVI, Cd.4496), table 24; Walker, L.M., 'The tractor in Scottish farming' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 21 (1938), p.364; Department of Agriculture for Scotland, *Scottish farming. Eleventh economic report 1938/39-1940/41* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1946), p.5

Prior to these years, the poor reliability and lack of applicability of the new technology meant that until the introduction of further mechanical developments, especially implements designed specifically for use with tractors, there was unlikely to be a widespread take-up. Many of the technical problems were eliminated in the 1930s, and, as Table 19 shows, the number of tractors began to increase fairly rapidly. Not surprisingly the primary location of these tractors was on large farms in the arable-producing

¹ Anon., 'Estate management as affected by recent agricultural depression' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 18 (1935), pp.309-317.

² Whetham, E.H., 'The mechanisation of British farming, 1910-1945' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 21 (1970), pp.317-331.

areas of eastern Scotland¹. In 1939 Witney calculated that 24% of the motive power on Scottish farms came from tractors². However, this figure may be inflated since it was commonly believed that many tractors were being underutilised at the time, farmers lacking the skilled labour and technical knowledge to make full use of their investments³. Demand side factors also had a role to play, and the large increase in numbers in 1938-9 was probably linked to the rising cost of labour⁴. Overall, the adoption of tractors was much slower in Scotland than in England and Wales, a consequence of the greater importance of the arable sector in English farming, and also of the ability of Scottish farmers to reduce real wage costs during the mid 1930s⁵.

The diffusion of milking machines is more uncertain. Surveys by the Scottish Milk Records Association show that any increase was very gradual, and that there were widespread regional variations in adoption rates (Table 20). About a fifth of all production was mechanised by the early 1930s. On the other hand, the Scottish Milk Records Association figures, whilst applying to a large number of herds (1929, 708; 1934, 742), may well be biased to the more entrepreneurial farmers, since the association's aim was to improve the quality and coverage of milk records. Gilchrist, in his 1935 article on the South-West, concluded that there was little evidence for a general expansion in the use of milking machines⁶.

¹ *The agricultural output of Scotland, 1925* (P.P.1928-9, V, Cd.3191), Tables 26 and 27; *The agricultural output of Scotland, 1930* (P.P.1933-4, XXVI, Cd. 4496), Tables 23 and 24; Walker, L.M., 'The tractor in Scottish farming' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 21 (1938), p.364.

² Witney, D., 'Economic studies in farm mechanisation' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 8 (1949), p.181.

³ Walker, L.M., 'The tractor in Scottish farming', pp.366-368. Collins also believes this to be the case, and has argued that the introduction of tractors during the interwar period was complementary to the deployment of horse power (Collins, E.J.T., 'The farm horse economy of England and Wales in the early tractor age 1900-40' in F.M.L.Thompson (ed.), *Horses in European economic history: a preliminary canter* (British Agricultural History Society, Reading, 1983), pp.73-97).

⁴ Chapter 3; Walker, L.M., 'The tractor in Scottish farming', p.364.

⁵ Mackay, D., 'Agriculture', p.50. On labour costs see above and chapter 3.

⁶ Gilchrist, J.A., 'Agriculture in the south-west of Scotland, past and present trends' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 3 (1935), p.234.

Table 20: Percentage of cows and herds milked by machines, 1929 and 1934

Area	Herds		Cows	
	1929	1934	1929	1934
Dumfries & Galloway	28	26	34	29
Ayrshire	4	7	7	8
Clyde Valley	2	9	3	8
Argyllshire	12	25	15	35
South-East	19	48	31	63
Rest of Scotland	5	18	8	23
SCOTLAND	13	17	21	22

Source: McCandlish, A.C. and Struthers, J.P., 'Milking-machines in Scotland' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture* , 18 (1935), p.365

The most substantial changes that occurred in Scottish farming during the interwar period were in the realm of agricultural policy. The 1930s are traditionally viewed as a decade in which the attitudes of government were transformed from those of *laissez-faire* to protection and direct state subsidies for agricultural production¹. However, more recent summaries of the development of twentieth century agricultural policy have perceived the Depression as less of a 'revolution', and concluded that much of the change in attitudes had its origin in the interventionism of the First World War².

It is true that the repeal of the Corn Production Acts did mark an about-turn by the British state; but this had not altogether been unexpected, and wheat and oat producers received substantial compensation³. Generally, the

¹ Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture* , ch.1; Murray, K.A.H., *Agriculture* , pp.26-39; Self, P. and Storing, H.J., *The state and the farmer* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1962), pp.18-19; Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture* , ch.7.

² Attwood, A., 'The origins of state support'; Cox, G., Lowe, P. and Winter, M., 'From state direction to self regulation', pp.476-478; Brown, J., 'The state and agriculture', p.185; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', Pt.II.

³ *Eleventh report of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland* (P.P.1923, IX, Cd.1871), p.67; Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy* , ch.3.

1920s did mark a return to the 'cheap food' policy of the pre-war period, in which British agriculture would have to compete in world markets on its own; it was simply not in the state's economic, financial or political interests to intervene¹. The general attitude of non-intervention was outlined in the 1926 White Paper on agriculture, where it was made clear that the government was opposed to the introduction of subsidies or protection:

'In the view of the Government, agriculture, of all the industries in the country, is the least adapted to drastic and spectacular action on the part of the State, and its present condition is not such as to justify revolutionary methods. In common with many other industries, it has been severely hit by the fall in prices after the War, but it is weathering the storm and there is no reason to fear that it will adapt itself to the economic situation.'²

On the other hand, the White Paper then went on to expound a whole series of measures that were aimed at raising the economic efficiency of the industry by improving general agricultural practices³. Already under the 1921 Corn Productions Acts (Repeal) Act, a commitment had been made to establish a fund for the promotion of agricultural development and research⁴. The government also attempted to improve the availability of credit to farmers through the Agricultural Credits Acts (1923-9), which were primarily aimed at enabling farmers to purchase their own farms and make technological and commercial improvements, although the overall impact of such legislation was relatively small⁵. The most useful assistance was given in the gradual derating of agriculture, so that by 1929 only the farmhouse and cottages were eligible and farm buildings and land were specifically excluded from rates⁶. Direct subsidies for production were introduced for sugar in 1925; the arguments being put forward were the requirement for 'infant industry' stimulation, and the potential impact on the reduction of

¹ Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support in Britain: the development of the agricultural policy community* (Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1990), p.84.

² *Agricultural policy* (P.P.1926, XXIII, Cd.2581), p.3.

³ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, p.72; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', pp.51-52.

⁴ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, p.140.

⁵ Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, pp.114-116; Symon, J.A., *Scottish farming*, p.228; Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, p.72-73. The 1929 legislation led to the formation of the Scottish Agricultural Securities Corporation in 1931, which had lent £631,000 by March 1938; though much of this may have gone to the re-financing of mortgages. In any case, the interest rates charged by the corporation were above those of the clearing banks (Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', p.362-363). For a contemporary attack on the ineffectiveness of credit policy see Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture*, ch.20.

⁶ Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, pp.117-118; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', pp.42 and 51.

unemployment as harvesting sugar beet was highly labour-intensive. This was extended under further acts in 1931, 1935 and 1936; but it was of little benefit to farmers in Scotland. Sugar production was concentrated in Eastern England, with only one factory being built in Scotland at Cupar (Fife). The subsidy itself gradually declined over time from 1927, and resulted in a reduction of acreage in marginal production areas such as Scotland¹. Mackay estimated that for the period 1925-38 the total sugar subsidy received by Scotland was £1 million, compared to £60.3 million in England and Wales².

When prices fell rapidly and foreign producers began to dump large quantities of surplus produce on the open British market during the early 1930s, the reaction of the government was *ad hoc* and piecemeal³, and no real strategy emerged until the mid 1930s. The Labour government, traditionally hostile towards, and mistrusted by, agriculturists, passed legislation that was aimed at improving the production methods and the marketing of agricultural produce, provisions that were of little use in times of severe depression⁴. The appointment of the National Government in 1931, and of Walter Elliot as Minister of Agriculture in 1932, were the major political turning-points for agriculture. New policies emerged in three main areas - protection, marketing, and direct financial assistance to producers. In general, the protective tariffs and quotas introduced by British governments from 1931 had little impact on agriculture. The political necessity of negotiating trade agreements with the Dominions, Argentina, Denmark and the United States, meant that a whole series of concessions was introduced, and all that happened was that food imports were increasingly provided from the Dominions. British farmers remained exposed to foreign competition and actual volumes of food imports remained at above their 1927-9 levels throughout the 1930s⁵.

The development of the various marketing schemes through the 1930s has been primarily associated with Walter Elliot (Minister of Agriculture, 1932-6). Elliot's view of the need to control the structure of production in order to

¹ Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, pp.442-445; Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, pp.75 and 90 fn.40.

² Mackay, D., 'Agriculture', p.19.

³ Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture*, p.152; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', ch.2

⁴ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, pp.214-243.

⁵ Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture*, pp.72-3; Rooth, T., 'Trade agreements and the evolution of British agricultural policy in the 1930s' *Agricultural History Review*, 33 (1985), pp.173-190; Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture*, p.161; Brown, J., 'The state and agriculture', p.184.

balance supply with effective demand, has been described as 'quasi-corporatism'.¹ This was enshrined in the 1933 Agricultural Marketing Act, which provided the basis of the various marketing boards that were established throughout the 1930s. Previous government attempts at intervening in production during the First World War, had been met with farmer hostility. However, the marketing boards were to be producer-elected, therefore removing suspicions of Whitehall control². The Boards had a rather mixed success rate, and the only two that had any real impact on Scottish agriculture were those for potatoes and milk³.

For milk, early efforts to co-ordinate supply with demand under the Scottish Milk Agency (1927-30) had failed owing to a lack of compulsion over both producers and wholesalers. During 1933/4 three milk boards were established in Scotland, the Scottish (covering Scotland south of the Grampians and by far the largest), the Aberdeen and District, and the North of Scotland⁴. The general conclusion has been that all the Milk Marketing Boards throughout the U.K. were successful in stabilising prices and improving milk quality; farmers benefited from the assurance of regular monthly milk payments⁵. The state also indirectly subsidised the sale of milk products; under the Milk Acts (1934-8) £466,733 was paid out to the three milk marketing boards in Scotland between April 1934 and September 1939 to assist the sale and production of milk products⁶. The Potato Marketing Board, covering the whole of Britain, was established in 1934. It did reduce some of the severest fluctuations in prices, mainly by regulating the supplies available for human consumption and controlling imports. However, the substantial variations in price with the size of harvests remained a major problem⁷.

¹ For an detailed discussion of the views and policies of Elliot see Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, ch.9. Cooper actually explicitly uses the term on p.180.

² Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, p.170.

³ The best study of the operations of the marketing boards remains Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation* and Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', Pt.II, from which specific details on each of the schemes can be obtained.

⁴ The history of all these organisations is covered in Walworth, G., *Feeding the Nation*, ch.19, and Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', ch.5.

⁵ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, pp.249-255; Brown, J., *Agriculture in England*, pp.120-122; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', ch.5.

⁶ *Twenty-sixth report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland for 1937* (P.P.1937-38, VIII, Cd.5736), p.20; *Twenty-seventh report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland for 1938* (P.P.1938-9, IX, Cd.5968), pp.21-22; *Report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland for the ten years, 1939-1948* (P.P.1948-49, XI, Cd.7717), p.119.

⁷ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history*, pp.246-247; Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, ch.20, especially see his table of price variations on p.428. Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', ch.6.

Most agricultural commodities remained outside the provisions of the marketing boards, and the most important impact of government policy in financial terms was to be through direct producer subsidies. These, excluding those for sugar beet, were first introduced under the 1932 Wheat Act, which provided for 'deficiency payments' to producers funded by a levy on milled flour. The Act itself was far from a blank cheque for farmers, the deficiency payments were to be controlled by an independent Wheat Commission, and the expansion in acreage limited by a quota¹.

Table 21: Major agricultural subsidies paid to Scottish farmers, 1933-38 (£)

Year	Wheat	Barley and Oats	Year	Cattle
1933-4	410,559			
1934-5	382,000		1934	^b 222,695
1935-6	392,453		1935	827,065
1936-7	73,291		1936	893,171
1937-8	138,000	^a 84,485	1937	909,427
1938-9	N/A	84,402	1938	1,034,900

^a for the calendar year 1937

^b September to December only

Source: *Twenty-third report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland* (P.P.1934-5, VII, Cd.4840), pp.17 and 28; *Twenty-fourth report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland* (P.P.1935-6, VII, Cd.5126), pp.19 and 31; *Twenty-fifth report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland* (P.P.1936-7, IX, Cd.5410), pp.17 and 34; *Twenty-sixth report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland* (P.P.1937-8, VIII, Cd.5736), pp.16 and 31; *Twenty-seventh report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland* (P.P.1938-9, IX, Cd.5968), pp.31-2; *Report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland for the ten years, 1939-1948* (P.P.1948-9, XI, Cd.7717), p.119.

Because wheat was not a crop of substantial importance in Scotland, most of the subsidy went to farmers in England². Though the Act did result in an expansion of the wheat acreage in Scotland, and provided a substantial financial benefit to wheat producers in Scotland, particularly in the years of

¹ For a discussion of the Act see Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, chs.10-11; Mollett, J.A., 'The Wheat Act of 1932. A forerunner of modern farm price support programmes' *Agricultural History Review*, 8 (1960), pp.20-35; Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', pp.235-240; Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, pp.146.

² Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture*, p.114.

low world prices (see Table 21). Of greater importance to Scotland was the fat cattle subsidy, introduced under the 1934 Cattle Industry (Emergency Provisions) Act. As is made clear by its title, the Act was intended to be a stop-gap measure until a more permanent and satisfactory scheme involving the Dominions and Argentina could be introduced. The general unwillingness of the Dominions to become involved in production limitation schemes meant that the British state was forced to accept direct exchequer subsidies as the only way of supporting much of the agricultural industry¹. As a result of Scotland's heavy reliance on the beef market, it received substantial payments under the 1934 Act and the later 1937 Livestock Industry Act, especially since per capita payments were greater on premium quality cattle. In 1934 84% of animals in Scotland received a higher rate subsidy compared to 40% in England and less than 20% in Wales².

The government's willingness to accept direct subsidies for agriculture was also driven, by the late 1930s, by its concerns over the political and military situation in Europe and the growing threat of war³. The result was a gradual expansion of direct subsidy payments to other commodities. Under the 1937 Agriculture Act, deficiency payments were introduced for barley and oats, but at a low level, and despite their much greater importance in Scotland the total subsidy received for barley and oats remained well below that for wheat (Table 21). The state's general desire to improve the productivity of agriculture led to the introduction of subsidies for lime and basic slag in September 1937⁴. Nevertheless, the sector that had undoubtedly suffered the most, sheep, did not gain a subsidy until the 1939 Agricultural Development Act⁵.

Over the whole period 1921-38, Mackay estimates total state assistance in Scotland to be £23.2 million, and in England and Wales £177.5 million; 11.6% of assistance therefore went to an area accounting for 15.6% of British farming output⁶. The reason why Scotland received a lower proportion of the new subsidies was simply its product base, for the largest

¹ Rooth, T., 'Trade agreements'; Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, p.190.

² Astor (Viscount) and Rowntree, B.S., *British agriculture*, p.159. However the higher 'quality' subsidy boosted the production of such cattle in England and Wales in the period 1934-9.

³ Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*, p.84.

⁴ May 1937-May 1938 Scottish farmers received £171,000 (S.R.O., AF43/124, *Agricultural policy. General, 1939*, Memo to N.I.Forbes 26 April 1939, p.2).

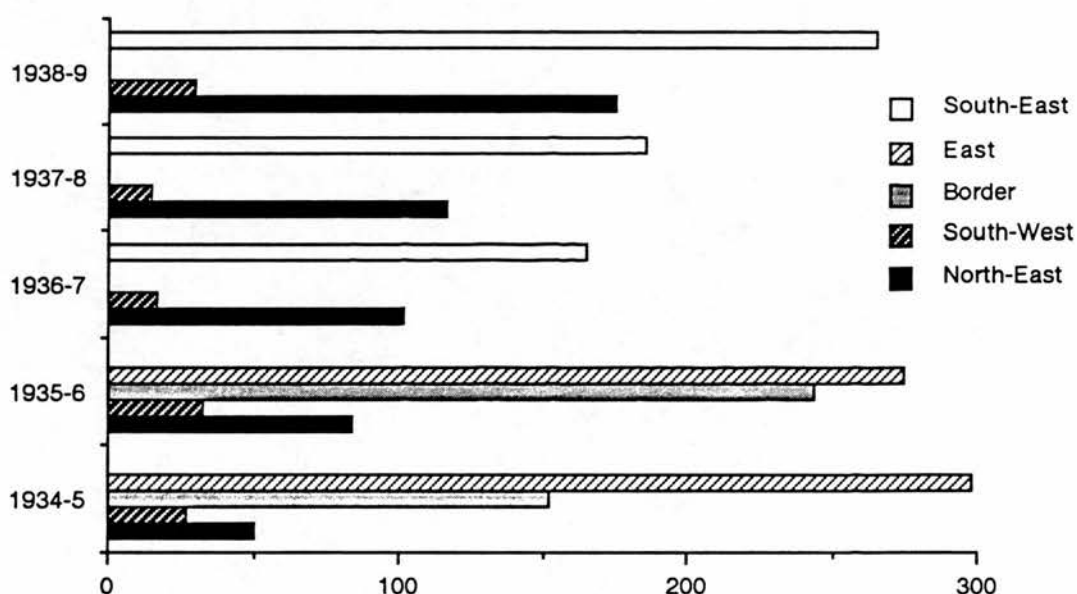
⁵ Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, pp.485-486. Livestock policy in general is covered by Webber, A.R., 'Government policy', ch.9.

⁶ Mackay, D. 'Agriculture', p.12.

recipients of assistance were sugar beet and wheat producers¹. Such a pattern is confirmed internally in Scotland, where the farmers who received the most support were arable farmers in the South-East (see Graphs 8 and 9). Given that the overall price index for Scottish agricultural sector remained below that for England and Wales, this seems rather strange². However, the reason almost certainly lay in the success of the Wheat Act, and its source of funding, which, because it came from a levy on flour, was not a particular concern of the Treasury and remained hidden from the public scrutiny³. Similar levies on other products proved politically impossible to introduce, primarily because of opposition from the Dominions. The switch to exchequer subsidies could only be gradual given that such payments were under the direct eye of the Treasury and Parliament⁴.

Graph 8

Average subsidy payments per holding, by region, 1934-39 (£)



Source: Department of Agriculture for Scotland, Reports on the profitability of farming in Scotland, 1934/5-38/9 (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1936-1946)

Note: In 1936-7 'Border' and 'East' were combined into 'South-East'

¹ Scottish National Development Committee, *Scottish Agriculture*, p.27.

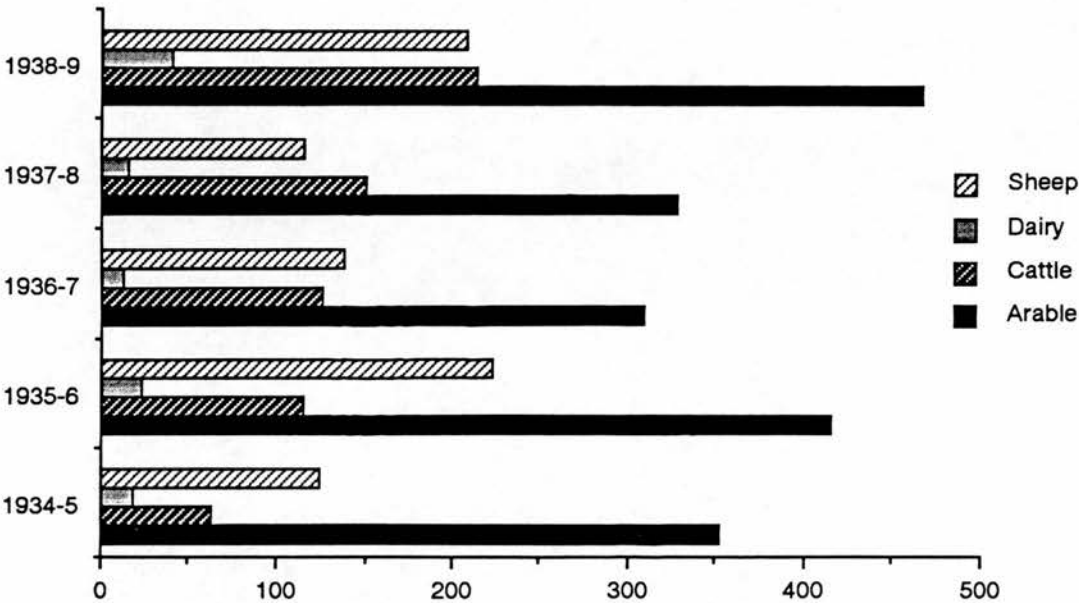
² Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food/Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, *A century of agricultural statistics*, p.85.

³ For criticism of this aspect of the wheat scheme see Walworth, G., *Feeding the nation*, pp.231-232.

⁴ Rooth, T., 'Trade agreements'.

Graph 9

Average subsidy payments per holding, by type, 1934-9 (£)



Source: See Graph 8

Note: In 1936-7 'Border' and 'East' were combined into 'South-East'

Conclusion

The overall emphasis on the structure and nature of agricultural production throughout the first half of the twentieth century was stability and continuity.

'The relative stability of the structure as a whole is not really surprising when it is remembered that up to 1939, the pressure of economic circumstances was perhaps least discouraging to those spheres of production in which Scottish agriculture was, and still is, naturally best suited, namely, the various forms of livestock production; that the industry was already well established on a commercial basis in 1870; and that the extent of the agricultural area had, for all practical purposes, reached its limit by the end of the 19th century.'¹

Scottish farmers, then, remained primarily livestock producers, even during the 'interregnum' of the First World War; and the basic pattern of production, with its concentration on complex rotations was unchanged. Regional specialisations, dairying in the South-West, beef cattle in the North-East, sheep on the Borders, were much the same in 1900 as in 1939. The majority of farmers continued to operate under a regime of mixed arable-livestock husbandry.

However, some lasting alterations had been achieved. Most important was the emergence of the state as a major provider of agricultural income for the industry. The origins of this can be seen during 1916-21, but were most fully developed during the 1930s. Pattern of land ownership was also changing, though at a gradual pace. In 1908 12% of land was farmed by owner occupiers, by 1939 this had risen to 32%; the traditional three tier structure of Scottish rural society (landowner, farmer, worker) was slowly being transformed. Mechanisation, after a less than successful wartime experiment, was beginning to take hold by the late 1930s, but farmers relied mainly on technology which had been largely unchanged since the 1900s. In comparison with what was to come during the Second World War, these developments were relatively minor in their overall impact, but they do mark out the origins of much of the modern agricultural system.

¹ Whitby, H., 'Some changes in the structure', p.333; for a comparison with England and Wales see Houston, G.F.B., 'Agriculture', p.88.

Chapter 3: The Scottish agricultural labour market

Scottish farm labour in the nineteenth century

As noted in chapter 1, the Scottish agricultural labour market in the nineteenth century has received a considerable amount of academic attention, in particular from Carter and Devine et al¹. The broad conclusion of such work has been that there was little surplus labour in lowland rural areas, and unemployment and low wages, features of the rural economy of southern England, were not a problem². In examining the reasons behind the continued social stability in lowland Scotland during the early 19th century, Devine had concluded that there was no permanent labour surplus in Scotland, unlike areas of southern Britain³.

From the writings of Devine, it is possible to expound a model that explains the economics behind this situation, one which appeared to hold throughout the nineteenth century. On the demand side, the pattern of employment on Scottish farms ensured a continual requirement for regular labour throughout the year.

"The hiring of labour...on a short-term basis was a logical response to the seasonal discontinuities of arable farming. In the north [of Britain], however, both climate and soil dictated a regime of mixed agriculture in which stock-rearing, fattening and cropping were systematically combined. Increasing production within mixed husbandry required an extension of acreage under root crops and sown grasses, a development which in turn encouraged a lengthening of the working year and an evening out rather than an accentuation of seasonal labour needs. This was an inevitable result of the varied tasks of weeding, dunging, singling and intensive ploughing associated with the classic Scottish five-course rotation. In essence, then, the reverse of those in a specialist cereal zone."⁴

¹ Carter, I., *Farm life in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979); Devine, T.M. (ed.), *Farm servants and labour in lowland Scotland 1770-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1984).

² For a general study of the English agricultural labour market see Armstrong, W.A., 'The workfolk' in G.E.Mingay, (ed.), *The vanishing countryman* (Routledge, London, 1989), pp.26-41.

³ Devine, T.M., 'Social stability and agrarian change in the eastern lowlands of Scotland, 1810-1840' *Social History*, 3 (1978), pp.331-345.

⁴ Devine, T.M., 'Introduction: Scottish farm service in the agricultural revolution' in T.M.Devine (ed.) *Farm servants and labour*, pp.3-4. This article and the accompanying essay 'Scottish farm labour in the era of agricultural depression', in *ibid*, pp.243-255; plus the article mentioned in footnote 3 form the basis of Devine's writings on the subject. Devine has reiterated his beliefs most recently in 'Introduction: The paradox of Scottish emigration' in T.M. Devine (ed.) *Scottish emigration and Scottish society* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1992), p.7.

The pattern of demand encouraged the development of a regular, permanent labour force, thus resulting in the establishment of the full-time 'farm servant' as the primary source of labour on Scottish farms, a skilled worker hired for a fixed-term contract of six or twelve months. This was a contract which bound farmer and worker together¹.

Devine concluded that this long contract was as much a function of the supply as the demand for labour. Rapid industrialisation in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Scotland ensured a long-term structural pattern to the economics of the agricultural labour market², resulting in significant movements of rural populations into industrial areas. The newly industrialised regions were concentrated in the central belt of Scotland, in close proximity to many lowland rural areas. Migration to industrial occupations was encouraged by a number of factors. Firstly, the Scottish Poor Law took an unsympathetic view towards the able-bodied unemployed³. Secondly, the main source of housing for farm workers, whether bothies, chaumers or cottages, was tied to the farm; itself a function of the demand for a skilled regular workforce close to the point of production, and also of a policy of the Scottish 'improvers' to ensure that the countryside was not to be burdened with an unnecessarily large population. Thus, a farm worker without a job had no house or source of public welfare, and with the next hiring fair six or twelve months away, had little opportunity of finding work; the only solution was migration. The system was so effective, it ensured that the problems of surplus labour were restricted to towns and cities⁴.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Scottish farmers and landowners were to become the victims of their own system, as further industrialisation resulted in a growing scarcity of farm labour⁵. The consequence was a substantial rise in both actual and real wages⁶. In addition, emigration had a dramatic role to play in further accelerating the

¹ For the patterns of labour employment see the essays by Malcolm Gray, Alistair Orr, R.H. Campbell and Michael Robson in T.M.Devine (ed.), *Farm servants and labour*.

² Hunt, E.H., 'Industrialization and regional inequality: wages in Britain, 1760-1914' *Journal of Economic History*, 46 (1986), pp.935-961.

³ Levitt, I., *Poverty and welfare in Scotland 1890-1948* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1988), pp.9-12.

⁴ Devine, T.M., 'Introduction' in *idem* (ed.), *Farm servants and labour*, p.6.

⁵ Devine, T.M., 'Scottish farm labour' in *ibid*, pp.250-251.

⁶ Molland, R. and Evans, G., 'Scottish farm wages from 1870 to 1900' *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 113 (1950), pp.220-227; Carter, I., *Farm life in northeast Scotland*, p.86.

flow of population movements, with Scotland having one of the highest emigration rates in Europe¹. In fact most emigrants from Scotland in the late 19th century were from urban areas, though emigration from rural regions continued at a relatively high rate². However, it seems likely that the most important impact of emigration was to remove labour from urban areas, thus creating demand for incoming rural labour. Emigration, therefore, had both a direct and indirect impact on the Scottish agricultural labour market³.

By 1900, the market for farm labour in lowland Scotland had had a century of stability lacking serious structural problems, with the balance of power appearing to shift in the workers' favour towards the end of the nineteenth century, as emigration and migration reduced labour supply⁴. The primary aim of this chapter will be to show what impact the economic shocks of the early twentieth century, the First World War and the Depression, had on the well-established nineteenth century structure.

The size of the permanent labour force

As was the common experience in industrialised countries, the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture continued to fall in early twentieth-century Scotland⁵ (see Table 1). However, the focus of this thesis is only those recruited as regular workers, therefore excluding farmers and their families, and casual labour. Both groups were important sources of labour for agriculture, and it is not easy to separate out their numbers. The only available source which runs over the whole period is the Population Census. The statistics of those directly involved in agriculture are given in Graphs 1-4.

¹ Baines, D., *Emigration from Europe 1815-1930* (Macmillan, London, 1991), p.10.

² Brock, J.M., 'The importance of emigration in Scottish regional population movement, 1861-1911' in T.M.Devine (ed.), *Scottish emigration and Scottish society* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1992), pp.104-134.

³ The historical role of emigration and rural-urban migration in Scottish economic and social development has recently been surveyed in Houston, R.A. and Withers, C.W.J., 'Population mobility in Scotland and Europe, 1600-1900: a comparative perspective' *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1990), pp.285-308.

⁴ Devine, T.M., 'Scottish farm labour' in *idem* (ed.), *Farm servants and labour*, p.245.

⁵ *Report on the decline in the agricultural population of Great Britain, 1881-1906* (P.P. 1906, XCVI Cd.3273), pp.5 and 28-31; Campbell, R.H. and Devine, T.M., 'The rural experience' in W.H.Fraser and R.J.Morris (eds), *People and society in Scotland, II, 1830-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1990), p.46. For a comparison with other countries see Grigg, D., *The transformation of agriculture in the West* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1992), ch.3.

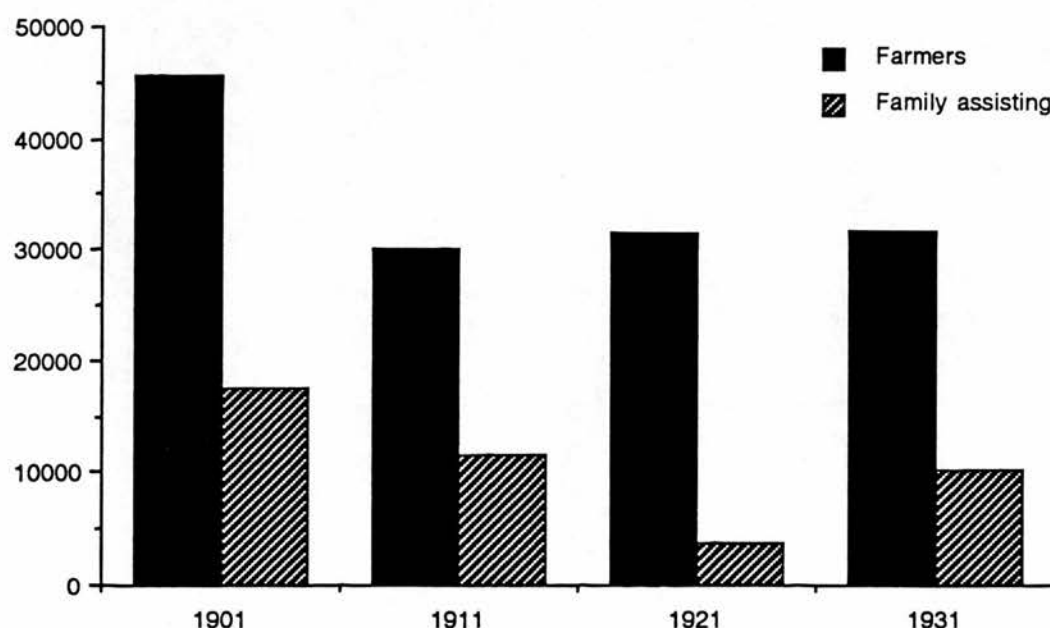
Table 1: Population employed in agriculture, 1901-51 (figures in brackets are percentages of employment in all industries)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1901	169130 (12.2)	40581 (6.9)	209711(10.6)
1911	166770 (11.3)	33118 (5.6)	199888 (9.7)
1921	159305 (10.5)	23781 (3.8)	183086 (8.4)
1931	160545 (10.3)	16187 (2.4)	176732 (8.0)
1951	129899 (8.5)	14516 (2.2)	144415 (6.6)

Source: *Eleventh decennial census of the population of Scotland, III* (P.P. 1904, CVIII, Cd.1798), Table XIV; *Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland, II* (P.P. 1913, LXXX, Cd.6896), p.xc; *Report on the thirteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1924), p.xiii-xiv; *Report on the fourteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1934), p.xxxvi; *Census 1951 Scotland, IV, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1956), Table 12

Graph 1

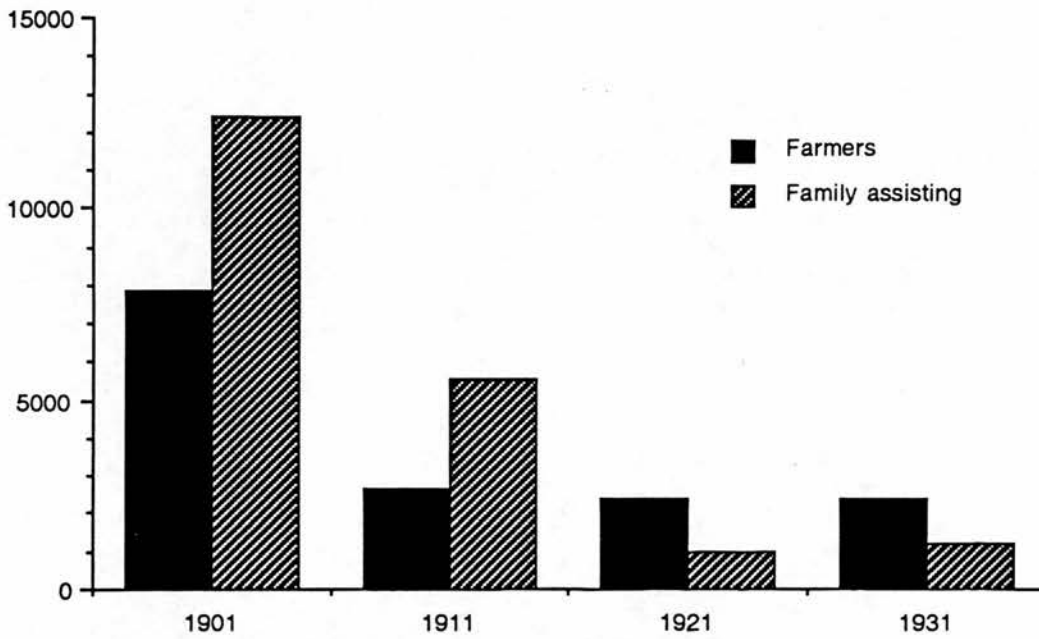
Numbers of male farmers and family labour, 1901-31



Source: Population Census, 1901-31

Graph 2

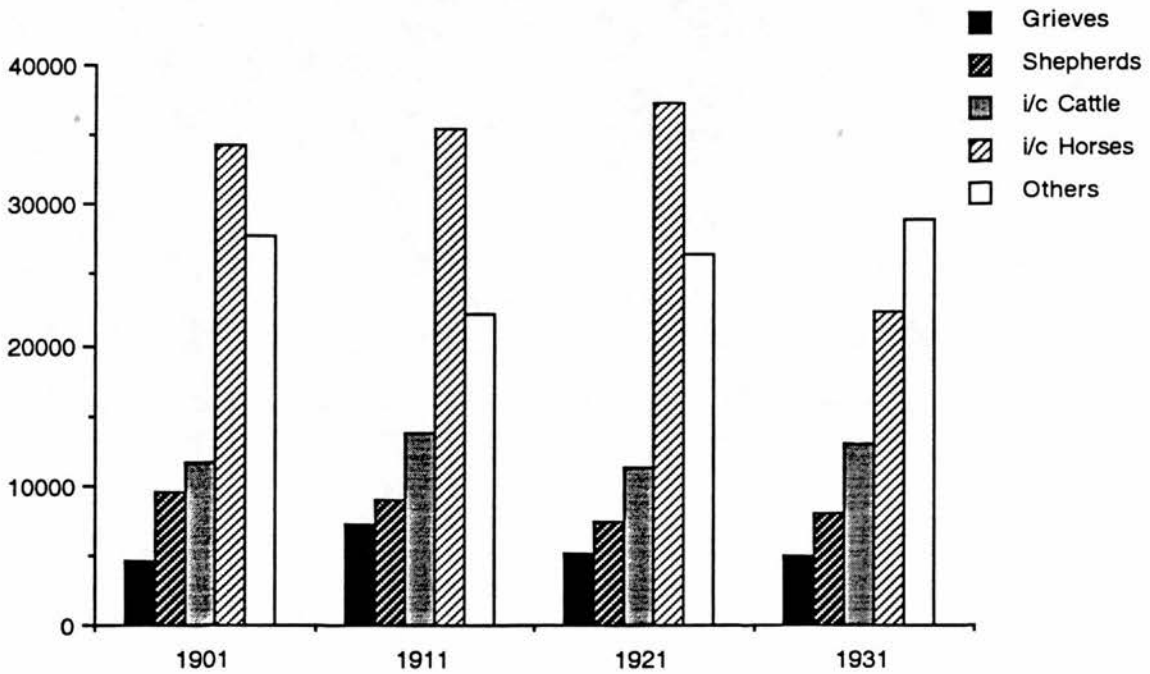
Numbers of female farmers and family labour, 1901-31



Source: Population Census, 1901-31

Graph 3

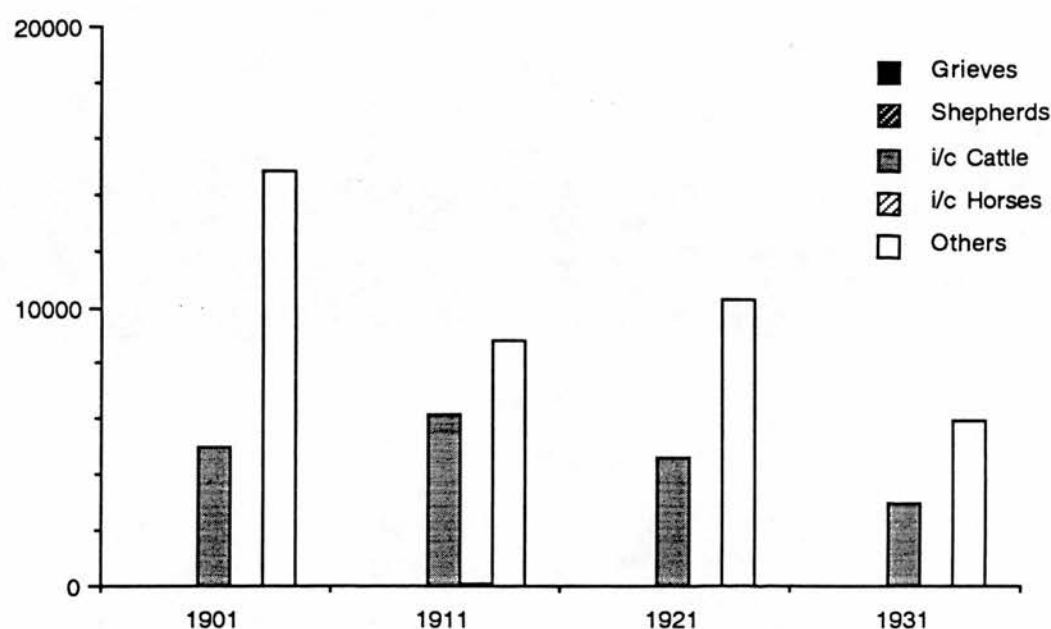
Numbers of male farm workers, 1901-31



Source: Population Census, 1901-31

Graph 4

Numbers of female farm workers, 1901-31



Source: Population Census, 1901-31

To arrive at the numbers of regular hired workers as opposed to workers who are part of the farmer's family, it appears a simple case of separating those employed groups (grieves, shepherds, farm servants in charge of horses, in charge of cattle, and not otherwise distinguished) from the employers and their families (farmers and relatives assisting with the work of the farm). However a cursory glance at the figures identifies a number of problems. Taking males first, the numbers of 'family assisting' falls dramatically 1901-1921, then rises in 1931. Meanwhile, for the workers, there is a rise in the numbers of horsemen, cattlemen and grieves, and a fall in 'not otherwise distinguished' between 1901 and 1911, in 1921 the numbers of horsemen and 'not otherwise distinguished' increase while the other groups decline, and in 1931 the number of cattlemen and 'others' has increased accompanied by a dramatic fall in horsemen.

The patterns for women are just as unstable. Family assisting falls rapidly 1901-21, those in charge of cattle rises 1901-11, falling thereafter, and 'others' falls 1901-11 and 1921-31, and rises 1911-21. The problems of occupational categorisation in the nineteenth century censuses, especially

of women, are well known¹. However, similar sorts of assessment for the twentieth century have yet to be undertaken due to the unavailability of individual returns under the 100 year rule. The understatement of women's employment was probably less of a problem after 1901, the 1911 census making it clear that 'the occupations of women engaged in any business or profession, including women regularly engaged assisting relatives in trade or business, must be fully stated'². Actual trends in numbers were being distorted to a greater degree by the varying classification of family workers over the censuses. In 1911 the instructions were that farmers' sons or other relatives assisting in the work of the farm should be returned as 'Family assisting'³. By 1921 the categorisation had changed to those 'giving unpaid help in a business carried on by the head of the household or other relative, for instance, sons or daughters of farmers or crofters assisting on the farm or croft, state the occupation...as though it were a paid occupation'; a definition likely to reduce those placed in the group 'family assisting'⁴. This is confirmed by contemporary analysis which concluded that, for males, many of the changes between the 1911 and 1921 Censuses were statistical illusions.⁵ Further confusion was possible in the rather ambiguous instructions of 1931.

'A person following a definite occupation upon a Farm should be so described whether he or she is a relative or not or whether paid or unpaid. For a relative assisting a farmer or crofter in the general work of the farm or croft, write 'Farmer's Son', 'Crofter's Daughter,' etc., as the case may be.'⁶

The result was an increase (males) or stabilisation (females) in 'family assisting' compared to 1921, accelerating the fall in worker groups.

¹ Higgs, E., 'Women, occupations and work in the nineteenth century censuses' *History Workshop Journal*, 23 (1987), pp.59-80, and *Making sense of the census: the manuscript returns for England and Wales, 1801-1901* (HMSO, London, 1989), ch.11; Hill, B., 'Women, work and the census: a problem for historians of women' *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (1993), pp.78-94.

² *Report on the twelfth decennial census of Scotland, II* (P.P.1913, LXXX, Cd.6896), p.cxii; for the treatment of women in agriculture by the late nineteenth century censuses see Miller, C., 'The hidden workforce: female field workers in Gloucestershire, 1870-1901' *Southern History*, 6 (1984), pp.139-161.

³ *Report on the thirteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1924), p.cxii.

⁴ *ibid*, p.liv.

⁵ Ramsay, J.M., 'Scottish agriculture in the census of 1921' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 7 (1924), pp.307-320.

⁶ *Report on the fourteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1934), p.lvi.

Therefore, although the census is a good indicator of the overall proportion of the population involved in agriculture, it is a less accurate measure of the different groups of hired workers. Fortunately, there are a number of other sources which are based on returns from producers (farmers) rather than heads of household, and these give a better and more consistent measure of the agricultural labour force.

The first is the 1908 Census of Production, where occupiers of agricultural holdings were asked to give the number of workers employed regularly during the last twelve months, distinguishing members of their family from others, and separating the number of males and females, under 18 and over 18. The calculations from this survey were based on returns from 60% of the total number of holdings in Great Britain (figures for Scotland are unavailable), but were skewed towards larger farms employing more labour¹. The figures for 1908 and a similar census in 1913 are given in Table 2. The fall between 1908 and 1913 has probably been overstated, perhaps due to different samples; however, one can conclude that there were about 100,000 farmworkers in Scotland prior to the First World War, of whom roughly 85,000 were regular workers.

Table 2: Numbers of hired workers in Scotland, 1908 and 1913

Year	Regular Workers		Casual Workers		Total
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
1908	68,000	27,000	13,000	8,000	116,000
1913	61,000	16,000	7,000	5,000	89,000

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1921, p.14

From 1921 onwards questions about labour were included in the annual Agricultural Statistics. These returns were compulsory from 1918 onwards, except for the period 1922-25, and are considered a relatively complete

¹ *The agricultural output of Great Britain. Report on enquiries made by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in connection with the Census of Production Act, 1906, relating to the total output of agricultural land, the number of persons engaged and the motive power employed* (P.P. 1912-13, X, Cd.6277), p.16. It is unclear whether any allowance was made for the sampling bias.

source of information¹. They required the occupier to give the number of workers on the farm, excluding the farmer and his wife, in the categories male (under 21/21 & over) and female, regular and casual. A comparison can be made with the 1908/13 surveys when the members of the occupiers' families are added onto those in Table 2 (Table 3). However the 1908/13 figures include the occupiers' wife in some cases (estimated to number 20,000 in terms of agricultural labour in 1921) whilst the 1921 data specifically excludes the spouse². Clearly there was a process of continual decline in the number of workers employed in Scottish agriculture up to 1921, though the rate appears to have been more rapid prior to 1913.

Table 3: Number of workers on farms, 1908, 1913 and 1921

Year	Regular Workers		Casual Workers		Total
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
1908	119,000	72,000	13,000	8,000	212,000
1913	102,000	53,000	7,000	5,000	167,000
1921	82,000	22,000	11,500	11,500	127,000

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1921, pp.14-15

The annual Agricultural Statistics do have the advantage of geographical coverage by county, and therefore it is possible to work out the numbers employed in lowland Scotland³; these statistics are given in Graphs 5-6. The pattern for regular females is fairly straightforward, one of continued decline, which accelerates post 1934. The total number of farm workers fluctuated through the 1920s, followed by permanent declines in the years 1929-33 and 1937-9.

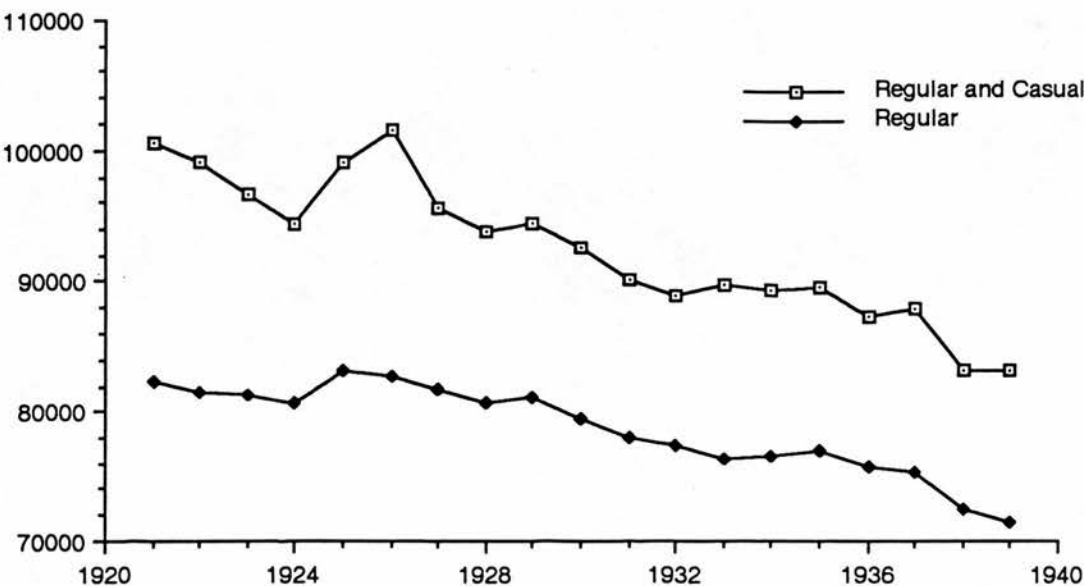
¹ Britton, D.K. and Hunt, K.E., 'Agriculture' in M.G.Kendall and A.B.Hill (eds), *The sources and nature of the statistics of the United Kingdom* (Oliver & Boyd, London, 1952), p.36; Clark, G., 'The agricultural census - United Kingdom and United States' *Concepts and Techniques in Modern Geography*, 35 (1982).

² *Agricultural statistics, 1921*, p.15.

³ As noted in the Introduction, the thesis is primarily concerned with employment patterns in this area. Lowland Scotland is defined as the counties of Aberdeen, Ayr, Banff, Berwick, Clackmannan, Dumbarton, Dumfries, East Lothian, Fife, Forfar, Kincardine, Kinross, Kirkcudbright, Lanark, Midlothian, Peebles, Perth, Renfrew, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Stirling, West Lothian, and Wigtown.

Graph 5

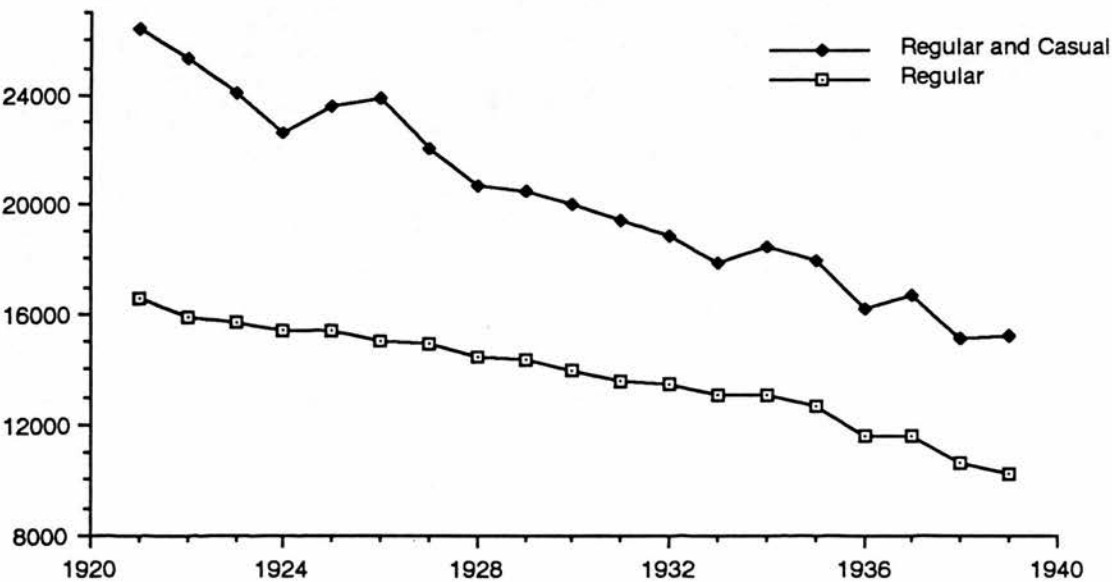
Numbers of farm workers in lowland Scotland, 1921-39



Source: Agricultural statistics, Scotland, 1921-39

Graph 6

Numbers of female farm workers in lowland Scotland, 1921-39

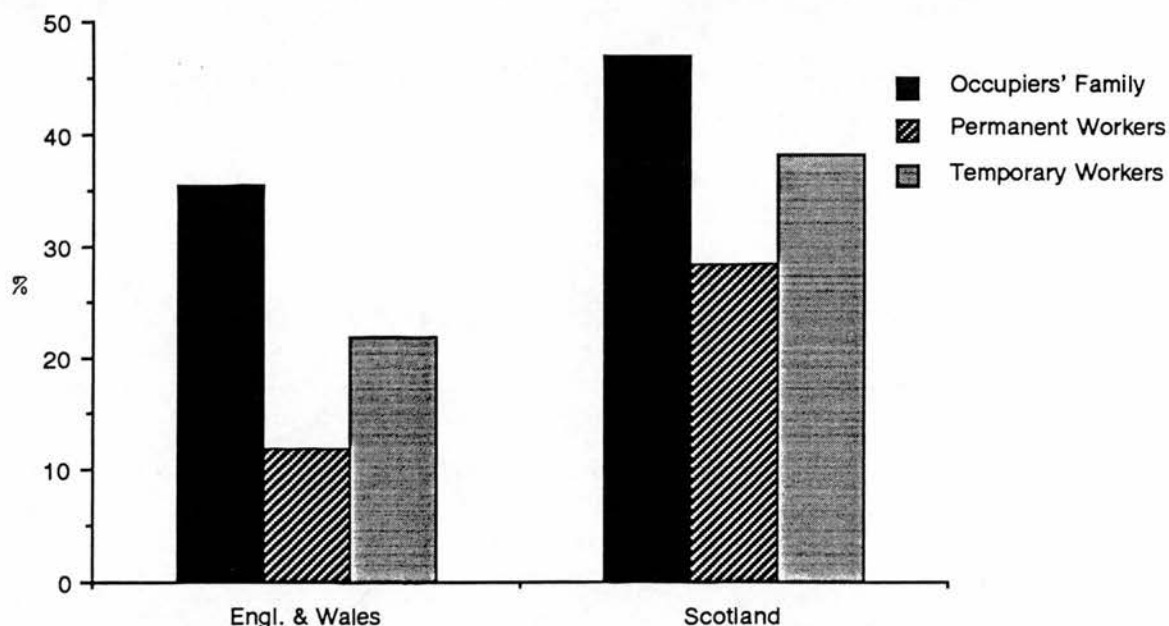


Source: Agricultural statistics, Scotland, 1921-39

Having established the approximate size of the hired farm labour force in Scotland, an examination will now be undertaken of its structure. Perhaps most important is the continuing role of women in agricultural work, a trend noted by historians of the nineteenth century¹.

Graph 7

Females as a proportion of the farm labour force, 1908



Source: Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, *The agricultural output of Great Britain* (P.P.1912-13, X Cmd. 6277), p.18

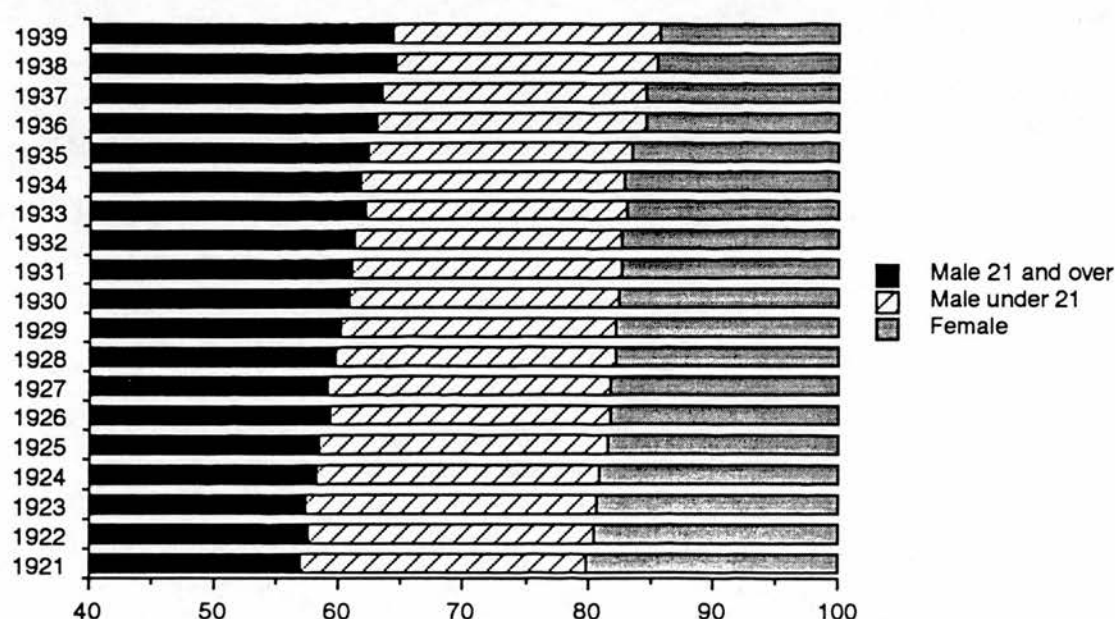
As can be seen from Graph 7, females made up a much higher proportion of the labour force than in England and Wales during the early part of the twentieth century, particularly within the category 'permanent' workers. The annual agricultural statistics show that there was a continual decline in the female percentage of the regular labour force (Graph 8), in 1921 in lowland Scotland 20.2%, falling to 14.3% in 1939. Female employment, considered as a proportion of the total workforce, was concentrated in certain geographical areas, Ayr, Lanark and Renfrew all had over 30% in 1921 and

¹ Devine, T.M., 'Women workers, 1850-1914' in T.M.Devine (ed.), *Farm servants and labour*, p.98; Robertson, B.W., 'In bondage: the female farm worker in south-east Scotland' in E.Gordon and E.Breitenbach (eds.), *The world is ill divided: women's work in Scotland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1990), pp.117-135.

East Lothian 29.8%, at the other end of the spectrum were Forfar (6.5%) and Kincardine (9.6%).

Graph 8

Composition of lowland permanent labour force by sex, 1921-39 (%)



Source: Agricultural statistics, Scotland, 1921-39

This resulted from the deliberate employment of women workers in two different categories, dairy workers in the South-West, and field workers in the South-East¹. Women were often associated with dairy work, and the high proportions for the South-West are not surprising, young unmarried females living in the farmhouse were a popular source of labour for many dairy farms in the area². However, one may note that in Ireland female employment in the dairy sector had been drastically reduced in the period 1890-1914 to well below Scottish levels³. In the South-East, despite the abolition of the

¹ BOAS, *Report of the Committee on women in agriculture in Scotland* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1920), pp.12-15.

² For the late nineteenth century up to 1914 Campbell noted that where dairying was strongest, so was the demand for female labour. Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers: changes in rural society in south-west Scotland before 1914* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1991), p.92.

³ Bourke, J., 'Dairywomen and affectionate wives: women in the Irish dairy industry, 1890-1914' *Agricultural History Review*, 38 (1990), pp.149-164; for a description of the continuing employment of women in cheesemaking in England see McMurry, S., 'Women's work in agriculture: divergent trends in England and America, 1800-1930' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (1992), pp.248-270. One may note, however that the major cheese

official 'bondager' system, many male workers' continued to hire out their wives' and daughters' labour as part of the employment contract, and the practice of 'family hiring' kept many women engaged in agriculture¹. This is in direct contrast to female employment patterns observed in other areas where large-scale capitalist arable agriculture predominated². The counties with the lowest percentages were those that relied heavily on single, male workers, and had little tradition of family hiring (Aberdeen, Banff, Forfar, Kincardine and Perth).

By 1936, female employment percentages had fallen markedly in all counties, except Aberdeen and Kincardine which recorded slight increases (1.7 and 7.5% respectively), though these two counties already had a low proportion of women in employment and the increases may have been related to a lack of alternative employment opportunities. The largest losers, where proportions fell by more than 40%, were the Borders (Berwick 23.6 to 11.9%, Peebles 14.5 to 8.2, and Roxburgh 20.3 to 10.9), suggesting a rapid collapse in the bondager system. Such trends are confirmed by the comments of contemporaries. In 1920, a Berwickshire farm steward complained to the Committee on Women in Agriculture in Scotland - 'There are not nearly so many women workers as when we were young; not so many are needed with the new machinery, etc., but more could be employed if they could be got....Ten years ago there were ten women on the farm; now only three.'³ Dealing with the South-West, Gilchrist commented that, 'from an analysis of the classifications one outstanding trend emerges, namely, the rapid and continuous decline in the numbers of women and girls finding employment as both regular and casual workers.'⁴

Scottish agriculture was also noted for the skewed age structure of its workforce. The best available source, despite the reservations voiced above,

producing area in early 20th century Scotland (Kirkcudbright & Wigtown) did not have a particularly high proportion of women in their regular labour forces.

¹ Robertson, B.W., 'In bondage'.

² Snell, K.D.M., *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660-1900* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985); Davidoff, L. 'The role of gender in the 'first industrial nation': agriculture in England, 1780-1850' in R.Crompton and M.Mann (eds.), *Gender and stratification* (Polity, Cambridge, 1986), pp.190-213. Davidoff does identify a clear difference in attitude to the employment of women between the Scots and English in the late nineteenth century (p.212). However this view of female employment is seriously questioned in Miller, C. 'The hidden workforce'.

³ BOAS, *Report of the committee on women in agriculture*, p.99.

⁴ Gilchrist, J.A., 'Agriculture in the south-west of Scotland, past and present trends' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 3 (1935), p.233.

remains the Population Census. It consistently shows that among the largest groups of male workers (in charge of cattle and horses, and 'not otherwise distinguished') between 42.7 and 51.9% of the labour force was aged 14-24, whilst for all Scottish occupations the percentage was 28.2% (Table 4). Not surprisingly in the most responsible jobs, grieves and shepherds, of whom there were relatively few, the percentage in the younger age groups was well below the national average. For females the case is less clear, though even here Scottish agriculture remained a young person's industry. However the inference from the male figures is that Scottish agriculture was recruiting large numbers of young workers, shrinking to a smaller hard core of older workers for the supervisory and more responsible posts. One contemporary estimated that one half of all male workers had left the industry by their mid twenties¹.

Table 4: Age structure of the Scottish agricultural and Scottish national labour force, 1921 (%)

Sex	Occupation	Age			
		14-24	25-44	45-64	65 & over
Males	Grieves	4.5	47.5	42.5	5.6
	Shepherds	21.8	36.8	33.9	7.5
	Cattlemen	42.7	31.4	22.0	3.9
	Horsemen	45.7	40.1	12.9	1.3
	Others	51.9	23.9	18.6	5.5
	All Occupations	28.2	39.7	26.9	5.1
Female	in charge of Cattle	55.2	32.1	12.0	0.8
	Others	60.2	22.9	14.1	2.8
	All Occupations	51.9	32.4	13.3	2.4

Source: *Report on the thirteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1924), Table 2

¹ Duncan, J.F., 'The economic crisis and the farm worker' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 26 (1933), p.279. For discussion of a similar pattern in England and Wales see Armstrong, W.A., 'The influence of demographic factors on the position of the agricultural labourer in England and Wales, c.1750-1914' *Agricultural History Review*, 29 (1981), pp.75-76.

Returning to Graph 8, the more accurate Agricultural Statistics only give an age breakdown for males, where it can be seen that the proportion of males under 21 remained broadly the same throughout the interwar period. The patterns by county are a result of deliberate recruitment policies; the North-East had the highest proportion of males under 21 in its regular workforce in 1921 (Banff 33.6%, Aberdeen 30.5% and Kincardine 29.8%), with the lowest proportions being where the family hiring system predominated (East Lothian 14%, Berwick 16% and Roxburgh 16.3%). By 1936, although the overall national picture had not changed dramatically, there had been some noticeable shifts. The North-East had suffered a 5-6% drop in the percentage of the labour force in this category, suggesting either a marked reduction in labour demand or an unwillingness amongst young workers to go into agriculture. Noticeable gainers were the dairying South-West, which may well have been relying more heavily on young male workers as the supply of young female workers fell away, particularly given the tradition of recruiting young unmarried workers to live within the farm household.

Labour force composition (occupations)

So far different occupational labels have been used without much explanation of their meaning within the structure of the Scottish agricultural labour force. The importance of the occupational structure will be examined in detail in chapter eight. However, a general discussion of employment would be inadequate without a description of the different groups involved in the workforce.

The Census split the regular workers into five groups - grieves, shepherds, farm servants in charge of cattle, farm servants in charge of horses, and farm servants 'not otherwise distinguished'. In reality, the organisation of farm labour was somewhat more complex than this. Broadly speaking, workers were split into groups according to their role in production:

Men

Grieve : delegated by the farmer to supervise workers on the farm, except the shepherd

Shepherd : in charge of sheep flocks

Cattleman or *Byreman* : working with cattle (usually beef)

Dairyman : working in dairy production

Ploughman or *Horseman* : in charge of a pair of horses, on some farms the head ploughmen was called 'foreman'. There was usually a rank order of ploughmen (see Figure 1)¹.

Orraman : men who carry out various 'odd' jobs around the farm, usually not involving the care or use of livestock. Sometimes involved in working with machinery.

Women

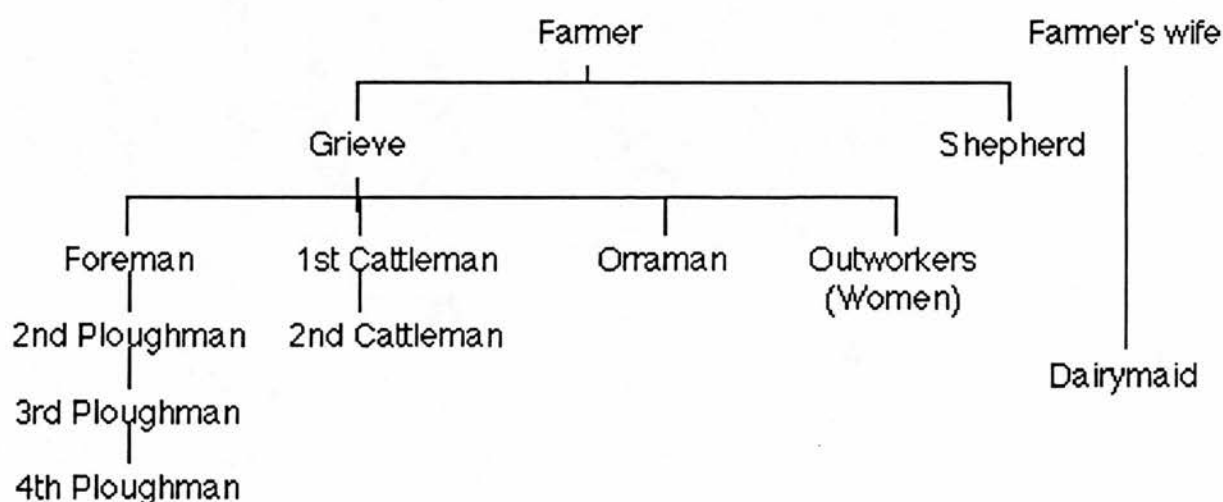
Byre or *cattlegwoman* : as above for Cattleman

Dairywoman : as above for Dairyman

Outworkers : field worker, sometimes the above two groups were involved in fieldwork as well.

Figure 1

The organisation of work on farms in Scotland in the early twentieth century



Source: Adapted from Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), p.138; Robertson, B.W., 'The Border farm worker 1871-1971: industrial attitudes and behaviour' *Journal of Agricultural Labour Science*, 2 (1973), p.74.

¹ Ploughmen throughout the north of England had a similar hierarchical structure, for example see Counce, S., *Amongst farm horses: the horselads of East Yorkshire* (Allan Sutton, Stroud, 1991), ch.7.

Figure 1 shows the possible organisation of labour on a farm in early twentieth century lowland Scotland. Much depended on the actual commodities being produced; for example, shepherds were uncommon in the North-East, and dairymaids in the South-East.

As was concluded in chapter 2, there was no substantial change in the nature of agricultural production during the period 1900-39¹. The first major revolution in modern technology with the development of reapers and binders, which occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century, had affected primarily casual labour². With only limited technological change prior to 1939 the system of labour organisation remained unchanged, except on large farms in the South-East where tractormen replaced some ploughmen. On the larger farms the occupational categorisations were more clear cut, with smaller farms being less likely to carry the burden of such a complex occupational structure. However, there is some evidence from just across the border (north Northumberland) that these occupational specifications were being eroded by the 1930s³.

The only source for working out the size of these occupational groups on a consistent national basis is the rather unreliable Population Census (see Graphs 1-4). The largest group was by far horsemen, except in 1931 when the 'Not otherwise distinguished' category was the highest. Such a dramatic change in the structure of the labour force was probably a statistical illusion rather than a reality; it may well have been that a large number of horsemen, particularly family workers, were recategorised between the 1921 and 1931 censuses as less skilled. A further complication is the possibility that amongst the 'not otherwise distinguished' were many temporary or casual workers. Turning to more reliable sources, a 1907 Board of Trade survey of 18,441 male farm servants, found that 61.8% were horsemen, 15.5% cattlemen, 11.5% shepherds and 11.2% orramen⁴. The comparative

¹ for comments on the impact of mechanisation in England see Armstrong, A., *Farmworkers: a social and economic history 1770-1980* (Batsford, London, 1988), p.175.

² *Report on the decline of the agricultural population*, p.8; Mutch, A., 'The mechanization of the harvest in south-west Lancashire, 1850-1914' *Agricultural History Review*, 29 (1981), pp.125-132.

³ Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects of farm labour in north Northumberland' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 4 (1937), pp.315-316.

⁴ *Report of an enquiry by the Board of Trade into the earnings and hours of labour of workpeople of the United Kingdom. V - agriculture in 1907* (P.P.1910, LXXXIV, Cd.5460), p.xxi. There is no way of telling how accurate this survey was; however it represented 22% of the number of regular farm workers in Scotland at the time of the 1901 Census; see also comments made to the 1919 *Royal Commission on agriculture* who concluded that 'the

statistics for England were 31.5% horsemen and 42.8% ordinary labourers, clearly demonstrating the different labour force structures.

For 1938/9 unpublished government statistics give the following national occupational breakdown (Table 5); note the significant increase in the percentage of 'general workers' over 'orramen' in the 1907 Report. Some of this may be due to the sampling exercised by the earlier survey, but there may be a case for arguing for a reduction in skill-specific classifications by the late 1930s¹.

Table 5: Numbers and types of adult male workers, 1938/9

Type of Worker	Numbers (000s)	Percentage
Grieves	5	9
Tractor Drivers	3	5
Shepherds	5	9
Byremen	3	5
Cattlemen	6	11
Horsemen	21	38
General Workers	13	23
Total Regular Labour	56	100

Source: PRO, MAF 38/816, *Agricultural Wage Costs: Scotland, 1943-5*, 6 XII

The different occupational groupings were unlikely to occur all at the same time on the same farm, as regional variations in production and general variations in farm size meant that no two farms were exactly alike. Further complexity was added by the difference in employment contract patterns, which itself helps partly to explain the spatial variations in the employment of workers already identified by age and sex. However, all Scottish regular

ordinary labourer in Scotland who is neither a ploughman, a cattleman, nor a shepherd, is comparatively few in number. There are very few men who are not either ploughmen, cattlemen, or shepherds.' *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.345), p.115, Sir James Wilson, Chairman of the Central Agricultural Wages Committee.

¹ Broadly speaking 'general workers' are assumed to be the same as 'orramen' in terms of their position in the occupational hierarchy; however it is possible that some general workers were doing the work of horsemen and cattlemen, but only on a part-time basis.

farm workers could be described as 'farm servants' because of the universality of fixed-term contracts (six or twelve months) and tied housing¹.

Contracts and housing

The 1917 Royal Commission on Housing identified the following major regional patterns of hiring and housing in lowland Scotland² (Table 6). In the North-East (Banff, Aberdeen and parts of Kincardine) the 'kitchen' system predominated, with single workers being hired on a six-monthly term with contracts terminating on 28th May and 28th November, and married workers on annual contracts (terminating 28th May). As has already been noted, in this area a high proportion of the male workforce was under 21. Workers were hired on the basis of receiving board and lodging in the farm steading, a system which encouraged even married workers to hire as single men and live away from home; farmers often preferred married workers to hire this way since it prevented them from having to ask for the construction of more cottages from landlords³. Food was provided in the farm-kitchen, though the practice of workers eating with the farmer's family was in decline⁴. The kitchen system ensured that the workforce in the North-East was dominated by young, single males⁵. Some married workers were housed in cottages, but evidence throughout the period points to a continual shortage of married men's housing (i.e. cottages) in the region⁶.

¹ With the exception of Northumberland, this was in contrast to the rest of Britain where the term 'farm servant' was applied to young, single workers (usually male) who boarded on the farms (living-in); Howell, D.W., 'The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales' *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp.262-287; Kussmaul, A., *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981), chs.1-2.

² Howkins regarded hiring and housing as a useful indicator of regional variations in the socio-economic experience of farm workers; Howkins, A., 'The English farm labourer in the nineteenth century: farm, family and community' in B.Short (ed.), *The English rural community: image and analysis* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992), p.86.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour: the agricultural labourer, III* (P.P.1893-4, XXXVI, Cd.6894), Pt.I, pp.132-7; *Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban* (P.P.1917-18, XIV, Cd.8731), p.171.

⁴ *Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland, rural and urban. Evidence* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), pp.1377-1378, J.Rothney, General Secretary SFSU

⁵ Carter, I., *Farm life in northeast Scotland*, ch.4.

⁶ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, pp.132-143; Scottish Land Enquiry Committee, *Scottish land. The report of the Scottish land enquiry committee* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1914), pp.217-221; *Report of the Royal Commission on Housing*, p.172; Scottish Liberal Land Inquiry Committee, *The Scottish countryside. Being the report of the Scottish Liberal Land Inquiry Committee 1927-1928* (Scottish Liberal Federation, Edinburgh, 1928), p.19.

Table 6: Hiring and housing patterns in lowland Scotland

County	Married Men	Single Men	
	Hiring	Hiring	Housing
Banff	Yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
Aberdeen	Yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
Kincardine	Yearly	Half-yearly	Bothy
Forfar	Yearly	Half-yearly	Bothy
Perth	Yearly	Half-yearly	Bothy
Fife	Yearly	Half-yearly	Bothy
Kinross	Yearly	Half-yearly	Bothy
Clackmannan	Yearly	Half-yearly	Bothy
Stirling	Yearly and half-yearly	Half-yearly	Bothy and kitchen
Dumbarton	Yearly and half-yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
Renfrew	Half-yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
Lanark	Yearly and half-yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
Ayr	Yearly and half-yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
West Lothian	Yearly	Yearly	Double hinding and kitchen
Midlothian	Yearly	Yearly	Double-hinding
East Lothian	Yearly	Yearly	Double-hinding
Berwick	Yearly	Yearly	Double-hinding
Peebles	Yearly	Yearly	Double-hinding
Selkirk	Yearly	Yearly	Double-hinding
Roxburgh	Yearly	Yearly	Double-hinding
Dumfries	Yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
Kirkcudbright	Yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen
Wigtown	Yearly	Half-yearly	Kitchen

Source: *Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland rural and urban* (P.P.1917-18, XIV, Cd..8731), p.162

Further south (Angus, Perthshire, Fife, Clackmannan and Kinross) the contract basis was much the same, six monthly contracts for single workers, and twelve months for married. Married men were housed in cottages with single men living in the 'bothy'¹; the division being strictly adhered to, even to the extent that in some cases when the sons of married workers were hired on the same farm as their father, they went straight into the bothy rather

¹ *The concise Scots dictionary* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1987), p.55, defines a bothy as 'permanent living quarters for workmen esp. a separate building on a farm used to house unmarried male farm workers.'

than staying at home¹. One commentator estimated that 90% of unmarried farm workers in Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan were housed in bothies². The difference between the bothy and the kitchen was that the bothy was situated away from the farmhouse, allowing the workers to lead separate lives from the farmer, particularly in the preparation of food (though much of this was provided as part of their wages)³. There is no evidence that the use of bothies went into decline until after the Second World War⁴.

In the West and South West (Dumbarton, Renfrew, Lanark, Ayr, Dumfries, Kirkcudbright and Wigtown), hiring systems and housing were similar to those in the North-East, the major difference being the employment of large numbers of women, both workers' wives and single young females. Hiring for all single workers was half yearly, with married workers hired on an annual basis, although in certain western central districts married workers hired for only six months (see Table 5). Housing for married workers was in cottages. The actual supply of cottages, relative to the demand, varied over the different districts. For example, in the mid 1890s, the Royal Commission on Labour reported shortages in Ayr, Renfrew, Dumbarton, but adequate numbers in north Lanark, Wigtown, Kirkcudbright and Dumfries⁵. In 1917 the Royal Commission on Housing identified Ayr as having an acute shortage⁶. Nevertheless, it is, very difficult to establish the overall balance between the demand and supply of housing, especially on a national scale. The 1917 Royal Commission concluded:

'While there is general agreement as to the lack of sufficient houses of a reasonable standard for farm-servants, there is practically no evidence of a statistical nature to show the shortage of houses of any kind in the rural areas of Scotland. A very complete survey would have to be conducted, with reference to the agricultural conditions prevailing in each area, before this could be ascertained....

The general trend of the evidence we received was that there was a shortage of houses for the married men, and that, even where the shortage was not acute, it was desirable that the number of houses for family occupation should be increased.'⁷

¹ *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1319, C.Ralston, Factor, Forfar.

² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.45.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.148.

⁴ *Report of the Royal Commission on housing*, p.171; *Report on rural housing in Scotland* (P.P.1936-7, XI, Cd.5462), pp.48-49 and 82; Adams, D.G., *Bothy nights and days: farm bothy life in Angus and the Mearns* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1991), pp.vii-viii and 58-62.

⁵ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, pp.54, 68-9, 85 and 99.

⁶ *Report of the Royal Commission on housing*, p.172.

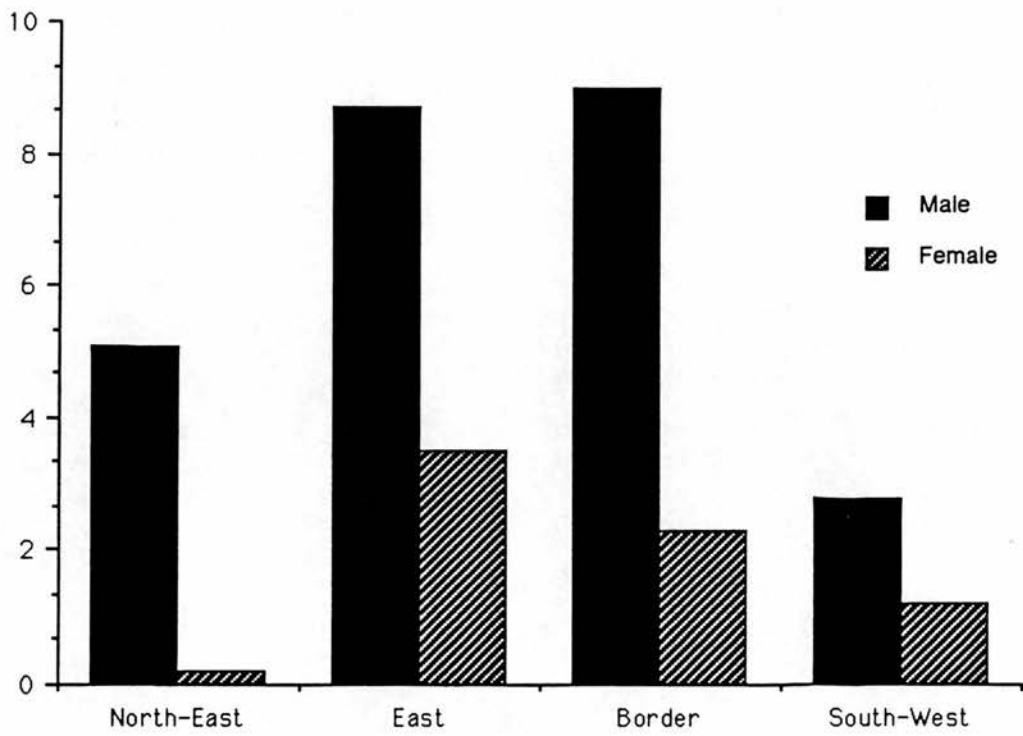
⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on housing*, p.172.

In 1928 the Scottish Liberal Land Inquiry reported that the Scottish Board of Health had estimated a 21,000 shortfall in Scottish rural housing¹.

The single men and women, hiring separately in the South-West, were generally housed under the kitchen system, with workers receiving food from within the farmhouse; women usually being accommodated in the farmhouse itself, the men sometimes within the farm steading². Occasionally bothies are referred to in the South-West, but in these cases the men always received their meals in the farmhouse³.

Graph 9

Number of permanent workers per farm, by region, 1928-9



Source: Department of Agriculture for Scotland, Report on the profitability of farming in Scotland in 1928-9 (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1931), p.37

¹ Scottish Liberal Land Inquiry Committee, *The Scottish countryside*, p.19.
² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.26; *Royal Commission on Housing. Evidence*, p.1314, J.Middleton, factor, Ayr.
³ *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1300, J.H.Milne Home, Scottish Land and Property Federation, Eskdale (Dumfriesshire).

One area where a shortage of housing was not a problem was the South-East¹. In 1913, in evidence to the Royal Commission on Housing, the Sanitary Inspector for East Lothian reported a considerable number of houses lying empty, though it is unclear as to the state of many of them². The adequate provision of housing was linked to the peculiar system of recruitment used in the South-East. Workers were hired in family groups on an annual basis (on 28th May), thus married and single workers came under the same contract. The family hiring system enabled the farmers to ensure an adequate supply of labour from their cottages, both male and female. In such a situation women workers continued to be referred to as 'bondagers'³; and father and son working together was called a 'double-hinding'.

The labour requirements of the average farm in the South East were much greater than other regions (see Graph 9 - 'East' and 'Border' here are in the south-east of Scotland). This encouraged farmers to seek family groups of labour, to ensure both an adequate supply and a variety of different types of labour (in terms of sex, age and skill) for the large mixed enterprises that were being run in the South-East. Family hiring also occurred in the South-West to a certain extent, where married men were often required to provide female milkers from their families⁴.

Such a pattern of employment and housing showed up in wage composition (see Table 7), where it should be noted that the percentage of workers in tied cottages was highest in the East and Borders, and the proportion of wages paid out in 'board' was highest in the North-East and South-West.

¹ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.21; *Report of the Royal Commission on Housing*, p.172.

² *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, pp.173-174, G.Reid, Sanitary Inspector, East Lothian.

³ Robertson, B.W., 'In bondage'. The same system of family hiring operated just across the border in Northumberland; Howkins, A., 'The English farm labourer in the nineteenth century: farm, family and community' in B.Short (ed.), *The English rural community: image and analysis* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992), pp.92-95.

⁴ See chapter 6; Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers*, p.91. Some dairymen in the South-West were hired as 'bow ers', a system where the family was paid per cow milked, however this died out after the First World War; *ibid*, pp.90-91.

Table 7: Analysis of wages and accommodation, 1928/9

Area	Workers in cottages (%)	Breakdown of Wages (%)			
		Cash	Cottages	Board	Other
North-East	49.7	71.7	2.1	20.1	6.1
East	92.0	94.6	2.6	0.1	2.7
Border	93.8	92.6	3.3	0.0	4.2
South-West	32.6	65.6	1.4	30.1	2.9

Source: Department of Agriculture for Scotland, *The profitability of farming in Scotland. Report on the financial results obtained on certain groups of farms in Scotland in 1928-9, with a statistical account of the farms in the counties of Berwick, Roxburgh and Selkirk* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1931), pp.68 and 71

Wages

When turning to actual wage levels, both contemporary statisticians and historians faced numerous problems. As a leading Scottish Farm Servants' Union official commented in 1940:

'Even if I knew as much about the agricultural workers of England and Wales as I know about those of Scotland, I am convinced I would be more confirmed that there is no such representative figure as the British Agricultural Labourer. British agriculture is a congeries of diverse enterprises, employing about 500,000 wage earners who are distributed over a variety of occupations. We can list the main classes under shepherds, cattlemen, dairymen, pigmen, poultrymen, horsemen, tractormen and so on, but in each of these classes we shall find a considerable diversity of conditions, according to situation, farm organisation, class of stock, and the markets for which the produce is designed. To lump all the workers together and then produce some average figure to show remuneration of the agricultural labourer would give an entirely misleading idea of the position of agricultural workers.'¹

Agricultural workers were not unusual in having a variety of different occupational pay scales; however, there are a number of factors that make measurement particularly difficult. Of considerable importance is the

¹ Duncan, J.F. 'The British agricultural labourer' *The Highway*, 32 (1940), p.170.

valuation of the perquisites that nearly all Scottish farm workers received throughout the period. These varied by occupation, sex, marital status and region. In addition, the structure of the industry with a large number of small producers each employing a relatively small number of people, means that the accuracy of any figures produced can be easily questioned. It is often difficult to tell the level of pay distribution across different farms. However, no attempt has been made to calculate the level or movement of wages in Scottish agriculture during the first half of the twentieth century, and official guides give no figures prior to the introduction of minimum wages in 1937/8¹.

The first national statistics on farm wages in Scotland are provided in the 1907 Board of Trade survey². It was based on 15,800 returns from farmers, the names of whom had been supplied by the Secretaries of Agricultural Societies and Chambers of Agriculture throughout the United Kingdom. These probably reflected the conditions on the larger farms, where wages may have been higher. Nevertheless, this survey was more extensive than previous ones; for example, in 1898, 1,100 returns relating to 5,731 workers had been obtained from Scotland, and in 1902, 1,150 relating to 6,650 farm servants, all relying on similar sampling methods³. The 1907 Report did provide calculations for national wages based on all three surveys, using the same calculation methods (Table 8)⁴. In money terms wages were gradually rising during the pre-war period. However, this was almost entirely in reaction to inflationary pressures, and in real terms by 1907 the Scottish horseman was no better off than he had been in 1898 (though between 1898 and 1902 a small 4% gain was temporarily achieved). By 1919-20, little real gain appears to have been made since 1907, though the lack of national figures in the period 1908-18 makes conclusions about these years, particularly the war period, difficult. The 1919 figure comes from Sir James

¹ Official wage figures are available in Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, *A century of agricultural statistics, Great Britain 1866-1966* (HMSO, London, 1968), pp.63-70; Department of Employment, *British labour statistics, historical abstract, 1886-1968* (HMSO, London, 1971), Tables 7 and 8.

² *Report of an enquiry by the Board of Trade*, p.vii.

³ *Report by Mr. Wilson Fox*, p.5 and 72; *Second Report by Mr. Wilson Fox on the wages, earnings, and conditions of employment of agricultural labourers in the United Kingdom* (P.P.1905, XCVII, Cd.2376), p.8.

⁴ This was done by 'weighting' the average earnings of horsemen in each county by the numbers of such workers in the 1901 Census (see *Report of an enquiry by the Board of Trade*, p.xiv).

Wilson's report on farm workers in 1921, based on surveys of 1096 farms (about 4% of holdings over 50 acres), employing 3699 men and 672 women¹.

Table 8: Average weekly earnings of horsemen, 1898-1919/20

Year	Average Weekly Earnings	Retail Prices (1913=100)	Real Weekly Earnings at 1913 prices
1898	18/2	86	21/2
1902	19/5	88	22/1
1907	19/7	93	21/1
1919-20	49/2	228	21/7

Source: *Report of an enquiry by the Board of Trade into the earnings and hours of labour of workpeople of the United Kingdom. V - agriculture in 1907* (P.P. 1910, LXXXIV, Cd.5460), p.xiv; *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.67; Feinstein, C.H., *Statistical tables of national income, expenditure and output of the U.K., 1855-1965* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), Table 65

Note: The 1919-20 price index was taken as an average of the retail price indices for 1919 and 1920.

In order to establish the pattern of wage movements during the period 1908-19, the only alternative option is to use a 'basket' of local data. Figures for wages during the war are scarce, and the only consistent set of statistics was provided by the Board of Agriculture for Scotland (BOAS) to the 1919 Royal Commission on Agriculture. This consists of data for four different groups (Foremen, 1st Cattlemen and 1st Horsemen; 2nd Cattlemen and Horsemen; 3rd Men; Boys and Lads) for four areas (Aberdeen, Forfar, Lothians and Peebles, and Ayr)². It is then possible to compare these figures with those of the 1907 Report.

¹ *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.2 and 67. The accuracy of the statistics in this report was seriously questioned by the Scottish Farm Servants' Union, see *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1921, p.276

² SRO, AF 43/133, *Royal Commission on Agricultural Policy, 1919-26*, Evidence given by the Board of Agriculture for Scotland on 6th August 1919. There is in fact a table of wage figures given in Jones, D.T., Duncan, J.F., Conacher, H.M. and Scott, W.R., *Rural Scotland during the war* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1926), pp.182-183, however until 1917-18

Table 9: Weekly cash wages of horsemen, 1907 and 1914 (shillings/pence)

A Area	B 1907 cash wages	C 1907 wages at 1913 prices	D 1914 cash wages	E 1914 wages at 1913 prices	F Index: E as % of C
Aberdeen	11/9	12/8	15/9	15/7	123
Forfar	15/0	16/1	20/5	20/2	126
Lothians & Peebles	17/8	19/0	23/0	22/10	120
Ayr	15/10	17/0	21/9	21/7	127

Source: As for Table 8; SRO, AF 43/133, *Royal Commission on Agricultural Policy 1919-26*

Notes: 1907 figure for Lothians and Peebles taken to be average figure for the four counties (East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian, Peebles). 1914 figures are for 2nd Horsemen.

The above table suggests a substantial real wage gain (20-27%) for all areas in the period 1907-14; these figures, however, should be taken with a considerable amount of caution. The bases for the collection of the two sets of statistics were different; the 1907 report was the result of a large data gathering exercise, whilst the 1914 figures came from observations made by the BOAS local Crop Reporters, whose prime job was to report on the general state of agriculture in their local areas. In addition, the 1914 figures are for 2nd Horsemen, and it is unclear whether these are directly comparable with the simple classification of Ploughmen in the 1907 figures¹. If the top category (Foremen/1st Horsemen) is taken for 1914 then the percentage real gains rise to between 34 and 46%; alternatively use the data for 3rd men in 1914 and the percentage change works out at between -2 and +15. Overall, it is difficult to argue with the conclusion that horsemen, on average, achieved some real wage increases in the period 1907-14,

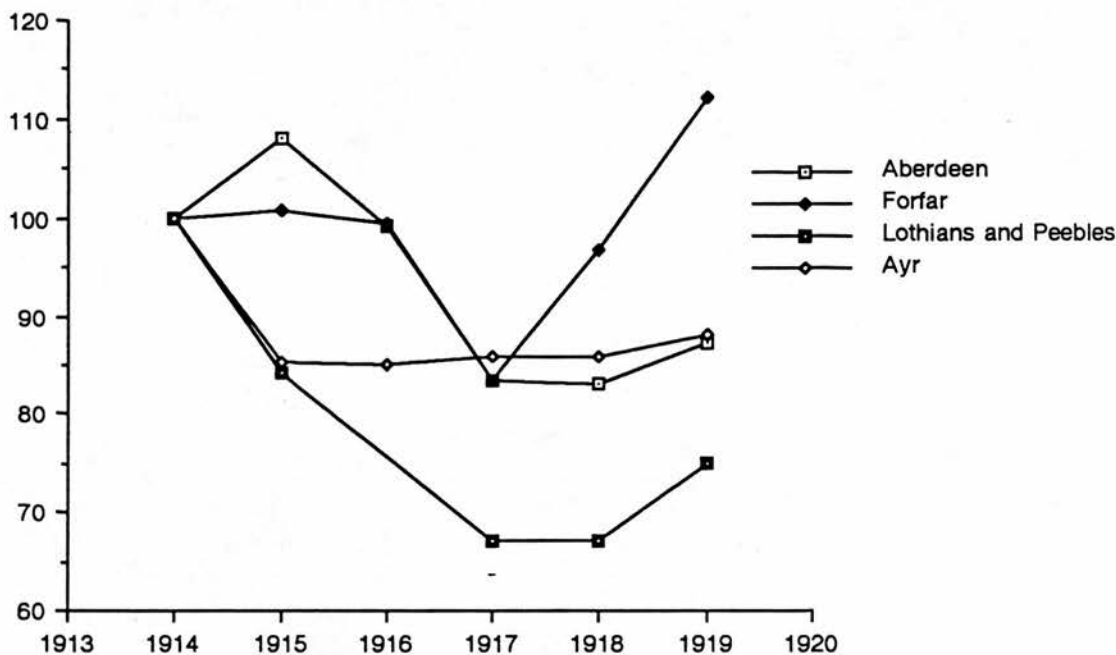
its geographical coverage is very limited, and since it is provided by H.M. Conacher (Deputy-Commissioner of the BOAS), one must assume the source is the same as in AF 43/133.

¹ see comments by Molland, R. and Evans, G., 'Scottish farm wages', p.221.

though these may not have been as large as the statistics in Table 9 suggest¹.

Graph 10

Index of agricultural wage rates, 1914-19 (at 1914 prices)



Note: Figures for foremen, first cattlemen and ploughmen
Source: SRO, AF 43/133, Evidence submitted by the Board of Agriculture for Scotland to the Royal Commission on Agriculture, 6th August 1919

If the figures in Table 9 are accurate and are compared with those in Table 8, then most workers recorded a noticeable real wage decline in the period 1914-1919/20, since real wages were unchanged between 1907 and 1919/20. Graph 10 confirms such a decline in the real wage indices calculated from BOAS data for Foremen/1st Horsemen/1st Cattlemen. A number of features can be identified. Firstly, early on in the war there was a geographical split between the North-East (Aberdeen) and East (Forfar), and the South-East (Lothian & Peebles) and South-West (Ayr), with the former

¹ The Board of Trade undertook a small survey of 98 farms in Scotland, and concluded that the absolute value of wages had increased by 9.5% between 1907 and 1914, however no details of this survey are available (*Reconstruction Committee. Report of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee; evidence* (P.P.1918, V, Cd. 9080), pp.16-17). In 1914 Duncan commented that wages had been rising for two years; NLS, Duncan Papers, Acc. 5601/4 'Memorandum on the 'Scottish Servants', p.4.

achieving real gains whilst real wages fell markedly in the South. Secondly, a certain amount of stability was achieved during the last two years of the war, though Forfar, inexplicably, remains an exception to this generalisation. By 1919, adult male workers had experienced a real decline in wages in most areas. However, by 1920 further increases in real wages left rates unchanged, compared to 1914¹. Similar patterns have been identified for England and Wales²; though it does conflict with the conclusions of Winter, who may well have been using different wage and price indices³. Therefore, the broad conclusion is that there was some decline in real wages during the war, but by 1920 wages had caught up with price inflation.

Graph 11

Married ploughmen's wages, 1919-33 (at 1914 prices)



Source: See text

¹ Jones, D.T, et al., *Rural Scotland during the war* , p.213.

² Armstrong, A., *Farmworkers*, pp.167 and 171; Howell, D.W., 'Labour organization among agricultural workers in Wales, 1872-1921' *Welsh History Review* , 16 (1992), pp.87-91.

³ Winter, J.M., *The Great War and the British people* (Macmillan, London, 1985), pp.230-237.

During the 1920s the BOAS began to publish county and national wage figures, continuing to rely on its local crop reporters. Graph 11¹ shows the pattern of real wage movements from 1919 to 1933 for married ploughmen. 1919/20 was clearly a high point for real wages in Scottish agriculture, with wages falling rapidly to a trough in 1923, in response to both the general economic depression and the specific problems facing agriculture. After this, wages stabilised during the mid and late 1920s, with a rising trend, indicating a stabilised inflationary situation, and potential demand for labour continuing to run ahead of supply².

It was, however, the depression of the 1930s, that produced significant movements in real wages (Graph 12). From 1928 figures are available for a 'weighted average' of all occupational groups, though it is not clear how this average was calculated. The wages of the four main occupational groups did move in line with the general index, with cattlemen and shepherds were well above it, ploughmen about the same level, and orramen well below³. In common with the rest of the economy there was a dramatic rise in real wages during the early part of the depression as prices fell faster than wages⁴. From 1932 the effects of the depression fed through as wages began to fall, though they never returned to the 1920s levels. Another dramatic jump occurred in 1938, coinciding with the introduction of minimum wages under the 1937 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act.

By the end of the period under review, farm workers had made real wage gains, mostly during the 1930s. Prior to 1914, there had been some rise after 1907, though its actual size is debatable; but it was far outstripped by the price and wage movements of the wartime boom (1914-21), where wages lagged behind price movements until 1919-20. However, these gains were

¹ *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921); Wilson, J., 'The fall in farm wages' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 5 (1922), pp.403-410; *idem*, 'Farm wages and working hours in Scotland in summer 1923' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 6 (1923), pp.446-456; SRO, AF 59/38, *Wages of ploughmen and shepherds (collective agreements), 1933-5*.

² Feinstein, C.H., *National income, expenditure and output of the United Kingdom, 1855-1965* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972), Table 65, retail prices index (1913=100), 1922 179, gradually declining to 1929 161.

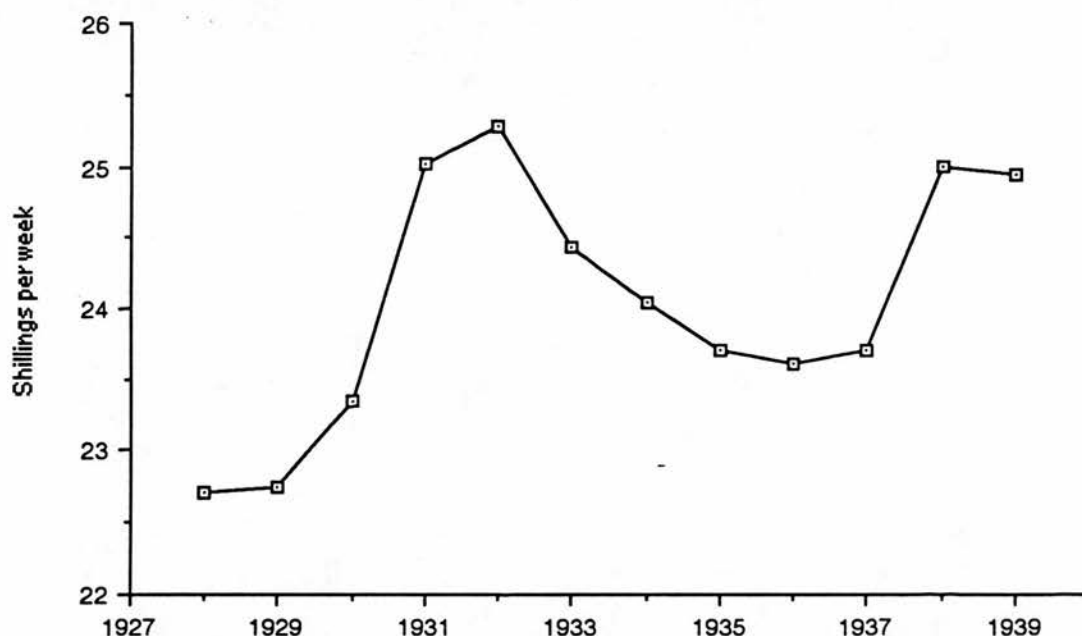
³ see PRO, MAF 38/816, *Agricultural wage costs: Scotland, 1943-5*.

⁴ Beenstock, M. and Warburton, P. 'Wages and unemployment in interwar Britain' *Explorations in Economic History*, 23 (1986), pp.153-172. There is however some debate as to how large this rise was and its importance; Dimsdale, D.H., 'Employment and real wages in the inter-war period' *National Institute Economic Review*, 110 (1984), pp.94-103; Dimsdale, N.H., Nickell, S.J. and Horsewood, N. 'Real wages and unemployment in Britain during the 1930s' *Economic Journal*, 99 (1989), pp.271-292; Beenstock, M. and Warburton, P. 'The market for labor in interwar Britain' *Explorations in Economic History*, 28 (1991), pp.287-308.

wiped out in the early 1920s, so that the average Scottish farm worker was probably little better off in real terms than he had been in 1907¹. Not until the 1930s was a significant 10% real wage gain achieved, and even then the situation was fluctuating and uncertain.

Graph 12

Agricultural wage rates, 1928-39 (at 1914 prices)



Note: Using 'weighted average' figure for wages (as calculated by the Department of Agriculture for Scotland)

Source: PRO, MAF 38/816, 'Agricultural Wage Costs: Scotland, 1943-5'

As with all wage statistics, these figures are not always what they seem at first. The reliance on estimates by crop reporters during and after the war rather than using surveys based on returns from employers was already receiving some comment by 1922². A detailed account of how the figures were arrived at was given to the 1936 Committee on farm workers in

¹ Waite in his study of the social impact of the First World War in England similarly concluded that, although farm workers made some real wage gains prior to 1920, the cuts that followed the end of the post-war boom wiped out any real wage gains; Waite, B., *A class society at war: England 1914-18* (Berg, Lemington Spa, 1987), pp.142-143.

² Wilson, J., 'The fall in farm wages', p.404.

Scotland, making it clear that the data was based on estimates from 42 local individuals, and that considerable criticism of the published figures, particularly of perquisite valuation, had been received¹. The calculation of wages for a national figure was the result of taking the arithmetic average of the figures received for all the counties; as one civil servant commented, 'It is in no sense a scientific process.'² The counties were not weighted by size, as they had been earlier in 1907, and this meant that small counties, such as Clackmannan and Kinross, were given the same weighting as the large ones. In 1936 the Department of Agriculture's statistical officer made the following conclusion:

'We have never been satisfied that our wage figures are the result of a close investigation. Their origin is that the crop reporters, who are appointed to report on the progress of crops and other particulars, were asked, as the War began to affect us, to supply us with figures of current wages and also with indications as to whether labour was plentiful or otherwise. These reports were of considerable use to us at the time, and we have continued the practice ever since. It is work done by a body of officials who are mainly engaged for other purposes, and we think that, on the whole, as indicating the trend of wages from one half-year to another, they are pretty trustworthy, but we should not like to pin ourselves to the literal accuracy of any figure as a good statistical representation of the fact.'³

The individual figures for wages often hid a fairly wide variation across the counties and within them. Even the National Farmers' Union for Scotland was prepared to admit that it was extremely difficult to discover from farmers what they were actually paying their workers⁴. The possibilities for inaccuracies were undoubtedly greater than in the pre-war wage statistics, which were based on actual returns from sizeable samples of farmers. Only one set of actual wage figures returned in schedules remains, that for horsemen in Aberdeenshire in 1907 (see Graph 13), demonstrating a wide distribution of wages.

¹ SRO, AF 43/186, *Committee on farm workers in Scotland, 1935-6*, DOAS memo 'Agricultural wages in Scotland'.

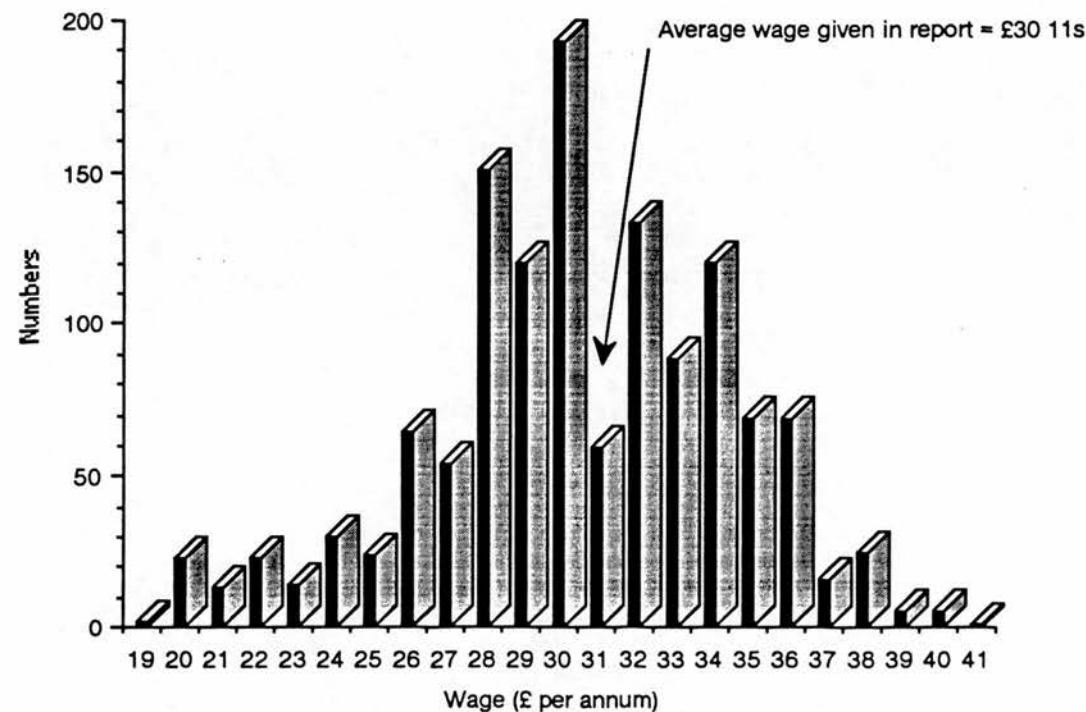
² *ibid*, 'Minutes of evidence given before the Caithness Committee, 25 February 1936', Mr. Laird, p.50.

³ *ibid*, Mr. Ramsay, p.50.

⁴ SRO, AF 59/51, *Committee on farm workers in Scotland. Correspondence with and evidence of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, 1936*, Evidence of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, Mr. Garvie, p.49.

Graph 13

**Distribution of cash wages amongst
horsemen in Aberdeenshire, 1907**



Source: PRO, LAB 41/157A, Wages and hours enquiry. Agricultural labour, Scotland, 1906
Note: Categories are such that 19-20 class is shown as 19, and 20-1 class as 20, etc.

Perquisites

So far all the above wage figures, except those for the period 1914-19, included a calculated allowance for perquisites which were an important part of the Scottish farm workers wages. Table 10 shows how they accounted for around a quarter of the wages paid out to workers. It also points to a gradual decline in the overall importance of perquisites, a continuation of a trend identified for the nineteenth century¹.

¹ Devine, T.M., 'Scottish farm labour', p.247.

Table 10: Percentage of wages paid as perquisites

Occupation	1907 (all)	1921 (all)	1921 (married)	1935-6 (married)
Ploughmen	27	22	21	23
Cattlemen	31	28	26	23
Shepherds	33	31	31	27
Orramen	20	18	16	N/A

Source: Calculated from, *Report of an enquiry by the Board of Trade into the earnings and hours of labour of workpeople of the United Kingdom. V - agriculture in 1907* (P.P.1910, LXXXIV, Cd.5460), p.xxii; *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), pp.67-70; *Report of the Committee on farm workers in Scotland* (P.P.1935-6, VIII, Cd.5217), p.46

These national figures hide widespread regional variations in the use of perquisites as a form of payments, as may be seen in the following evidence to the Royal Commission on Housing by the Scottish Farm Servant's Union in 1915:

'Farm servants are partly paid in cash and partly in kind. In the districts furthest from industrial centres the proportion paid in cash is less than in the districts near the industrial centres. North of the Tay the proportion paid in kind is considerable; in the midland counties it is less; while south of the Forth it is inconsiderable, if the south-western district is excluded.... The allowances given vary even inside the same county, but one or two typical cases may be given:-
Aberdeenshire.- House; milk, two pints daily; meal, six and a half bolls per annum; potatoes, one ton per annum; coal, two tons....
Forfarshire.- House; milk, one and a half pints daily in summer, one pint daily in winter; meal, six and a half bolls annually; potatoes, one ton.
Fife, Perth, parts of Stirling, Clackmannan.- Similar.
Midlothian.- House; four bolls potatoes; £1 in harvest.
Lothian and Border counties.- Similar, with occasionally cow's keep in Berwick, and increased perquisites remote from towns.
Dumbarton.- House; twelve cwts. potatoes.
Renfrew, Lanark, Ayr and Dumfries.- Similar, with more cases of meal and milk being given in the last three counties.
The men in the bothies generally get half allowances. These, of course, are rough averages, and there are wide varieties in the individual bargains.'¹

¹ *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1375, J.Rothney, General Secretary, SFSU.

Those men and women housed in or close to the farmhouse under the kitchen system received their board and lodging as part of their wage. Obviously, single men who were housed and hired with their parents under the family hiring system in the South-East did not receive separate housing. However, they were given a full potato allowance, and a family with a number of workers received a considerable quantity of potatoes under such a system. Women who were hired under the family system appear sometimes to have received potatoes as part payment ¹. The actual level of perquisites across the different counties for married ploughmen in 1925 is given in Table 11.

Table 11: Value of perquisites given to married ploughmen, by county, 1925, shillings per week (percentage of total wage in brackets)

County	Perquisites	County	Perquisites
Wigtown	15 (38)	Lanark	4 (10)
Kirkcudbright	4 (11)	Renfrew	4 (9)
Dumfries	4 (11)	Ayr	5 (11)
Selkirk	5 (13)	Clackmannan	1 (2)
Roxburgh	5 (13)	Fife, S.W.	1 (2)
Berwick	6 (15)	Fife, N.E.	12 (29)
Peebles	5 (13)	Kinross	11 (28)
East Lothian	5 (12)	Perth	11 (29)
Midlothian	5 (12)	Forfar	11 (26)
West Lothian	5 (12)	Kincardine	11 (28)
Stirling	3 (7)	Aberdeen	11 (32)
Dumbarton	4 (9)	Banff	11 (31)

Source: Wilson, J., 'Farm wages and working hours in Scotland in summer 1925' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture* , 8 (1925), p.432

There are a number of areas that do not conform to the pattern described above, such as Clackmannan and S.W.Fife, where the provision of perquisites was particularly low. It is unclear why this occurred but the above

¹ BOAS, *Report of the committee on women*, pp.68, 72, 97-103.

statistics may have concluded that free tied housing was not on offer, although other supporting evidence for such an assumption is absent. In Wigtown the custom continued of paying the farm worker a very large percentage of his wages in kind, in 1919-20 annual perquisites being reported as a house, 100 stones of oatmeal, 1 ton of potatoes, 5 tons of coal, and £2 at harvest¹.

There were considerable differences of perquisite valuation across occupational groups. Grievances, cattlemen and ploughmen appear to have received fairly similar allowances of perquisites, but orramen on average received less, and shepherds more (see Table 10). For shepherds in the Southern Uplands the practice of giving the worker a 'pack' (a share of the flock) was common, though this was in decline throughout the period². However, the keep of cow and the receipt of oatmeal (the latter partly being to feed sheep dogs) continued, without much reduction, for shepherds in many areas³.

Placing a value on perquisites has been a difficult task for both contemporaries and historians⁴. As with cash wages, perquisites could vary from farm to farm. For example, Graph 14 shows the distribution of potato allowances in East Lothian in 1907; there were two major payment levels, £30 and £40 per annum, the smaller lower group may consist of women and younger males, but there is also a widespread distribution amongst a small number of workers from £16 to £120.

¹ Wilson, J., 'Agricultural wages in Dumfries and Galloway district' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 3 (1920), p.331. For an extensive list of the value of perquisites given to workers in 1935 see SRO, AF 43/186, *Committee on farm workers in Scotland, 1935-6*, 5. 'Perquisites allowed to farm workers in Scotland as at Martinmas, 1935'.

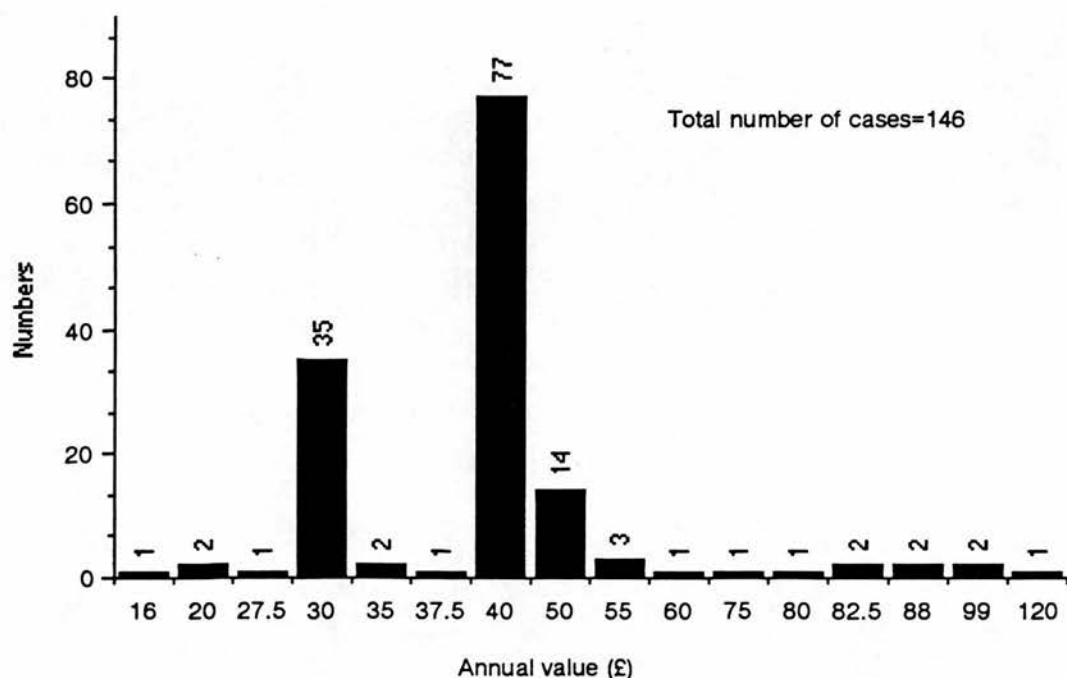
² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Vol.III Pt.II, p.190; Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects of farm labour in north Northumberland' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 4 (1937), pp.301-302.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, pp.135-136, 190, 200; SRO, AF 59/41, *Farm wages and hours summer 1923, 1922-5*, Memo by J.Wilson to R.Munro (Secretary for Scotland) 'Shepherds' wages' 23 January 1922; AF 59/51, *Committee on farm workers in Scotland. Correspondence with and evidence of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, 1936*, Evidence by J.Craig 21 May 1936, pp.9-12.

⁴ For historians see Molland, R. and Evans, G., 'Scottish farm wages', pp.222-223.

Graph 14

Distribution of potato allowances in East Lothian, 1907



Source: PRO, LAB 41/157A, *Wages and hours enquiry. Agricultural labour, Scotland, 1906*

There was also the issue of the actual valuation of the allowances received. The production of national statistics resulted in national values being placed on particular perquisites. For example, during the calculations for the 1907 survey 70 different valuations were established under 18 different categories (milk, potatoes, oatmeal, wheat, flour, barley, beans, peas, oats, turnips, wood, coal, peat, sheep, pigs, poultry, manure, and board & lodging)¹, and between 1917 and 1921, the introduction of minimum wages forced the local District Agricultural Wage Committees² to place valuations on perquisites, leading to valuations being produced for 12 different geographical areas³. The availability of such information, and the desire of the BOAS to produce

¹ PRO, LAB 41/157A, *Wages and hours enquiry. Agricultural labour, Scotland, 1906*.

² For details of these committees see chapter 4.

³ SRO, AF 43/133, *Royal Commission on Agricultural Policy, 1919-26*. Statement of evidence by Sir James Wilson on the operation of the Corn Production Act, 1917, Pt.II, 13 August 1919, pp.11-14

wage statistics in the 1920s, resulted in the main categories of perquisites being set at meal, milk, potatoes, house, coal, board and lodging and keep of cows¹. Initially the Board accepted the advantage of allowing local valuations to be made. Such a method received a considerable amount of criticism for its lack of accuracy, and in January 1925 the Board reverted to the pre-war practice of setting national values². Further problems were arrived at when deciding what figure to use for perquisite valuation, the cost to the farmer (the wholesale price) or the replacement cost to the worker (the retail price), a problem that civil servants were well aware of.

'I should like to make one remark in regard to perquisites. It is very complicated to assess the real value of wages...because leaving aside the amount question, the perquisites are valued at their cost to the farmer. The milk is valued at 1/- per gallon. If the Committee were going to consider whether perquisites should disappear and should be replaced by additions in cash, the compensation necessary for the milk, in cash, would have to be more than the shilling. It would have to be 2/-, to enable the farm worker to buy milk at the ordinary retail price....

If the Committee were embarking upon comparisons between Scotland and England or between one part of Scotland and another, they could not simply add the cash wage and the perquisites together and say that corresponded to a wage in England, because it does not. It is worth more, because in England, presumably, if there are no perquisites, that must mean that the English worker has got to meet the costs of purchasing the perquisites at a higher level than the Scottish farm servant gets them at.'³

Despite these misgivings, it was general practice to take the cost price of the products provided, though such a practice tended to reduce the real value of perquisites to the farm worker. There were also disputes over what the actual wholesale value of perquisites was, with farmers wishing to place a high valuation on them and workers a low valuation. A problem which particularly came to light during the negotiation over minimum wage rates under the 1937 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act, with the real sticking point being the valuation of tied houses⁴. Housing was a particularly

¹ 'keep of cows' is where the farmer provided housing, bedding and feed for cows owned by the worker. The main aim of this was to enable workers, particularly shepherds living in isolated areas, to be provided with a fresh supply of milk.

² The history of these changes and the valuations placed on the different perquisites from 1924 is given in SRO, AF 43/186, *Committee on farm workers in Scotland, 1935-6*, DOAS memo 'Agricultural wages in Scotland'.

³ SRO AF/186 *Committee on farm workers in Scotland, 1935-6*, Minutes of evidence by the DOAS, 25 February 1936, pp.56-57, P.R.Laird.

⁴ The files of the minutes of these meetings are closed. I am grateful to the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department for giving me access to those for the Lothians and Dumfries & Galloway; see SRO, AF 59/113, *Minutes of Agricultural Wages Committee: District*

difficult issue because the lack of alternatives precluded any direct comparative rental values. The general tendency had been to take the value given in the Valuation Roll, but this was often a nominal £4, which was the minimum yearly value which entitled the householder to a parliamentary vote¹. This rather arbitrary tradition of valuation, the abandonment of the property voting qualification in 1918, and the widespread variation in the quality of housing, meant that such a valuation was likely to be challenged by both sides. The BOAS stuck to a national valuation of £6 for a house from 1924 to 1937.

The continued payment of perquisites to Scottish workers was a feature that was distinct from much of England and Wales², and requires some explanation. For the mid nineteenth century, Smout and Levitt observed that those areas with the highest percentage of payment in kind were the most isolated from urban consumerism, and, for the 1890s, Devine has linked the commutation of perquisites to cash to changes in transport and the expansion of new marketing networks³. The increasing monetarisation of the Scottish rural economy was undoubtedly the major factor in reducing perquisite payments. This does not explain why they persisted for so long, but part of the reason was linked to the continuation of the kitchen system whereby workers were necessarily provided with board and lodging. There were also benefits to the worker in being paid in perquisites, as at a time of rapid inflation, for example, during the First World War, when it protected the worker from rises in the cost of living. Certainly at the turn of the century views were mixed as to the costs and benefits to the worker of perquisites.

'The payment of a large proportion of the wages by supplies of food, such as meal, milk, potatoes, etc., is objected to in some places, but certainly not by all in those places....

In southern counties there is very little of that form of payment, but I found, nevertheless, that in some parts near towns the labourers occasionally wished the small balance of their wages in kind to be converted into money. Others, however, but in not such numbers as in pure country places, expressed themselves as content with the present system. It is obvious that payment in kind to some extent is inevitable in purely rural districts, and the result of a compulsory change in the mode of payment

No.6 (Lothians), 1937-68, and AF 59/115, *Minutes of Agricultural Wages Committee: District No.8 (Dumfries, Kirkcudbright & Wigtown), 1937-68.*

¹ *Report to the Board of Agriculture by Sir James Wilson*, p.3. This was a result of the 1884 Representation of the People Act, Sect. 9 (6) [48 Vict. Ch.3].

² Armstrong, A. *Farmworkers*, pp. 119 and 181.

³ Levitt, I. and Smout, C. 'Farm workers' incomes in 1843' in T.M.Devine (ed.), *Farm servants and labour*, pp.160-1; Devine, T.M., 'Scottish farm labour' in *ibid*, p.245.

would lead to inconvenience, as for instance in the matter of milk. On being reminded that the masters would thus be entitled to charge retail prices, or even refuse to sell at all, thus driving the wife to tramp to another farm or to a village for a daily supply, the man would sometimes but not always withdraw their request for a change.¹

In some cases, the demand for a reduction in perquisites came from the farmers and was opposed by the workers². Therefore, it is impossible to say whether it was the demands of the farmers or of workers that led to the gradual decline. The dominating factor, however, was custom and tradition; even the Scottish Farm Servants' Union, who were strongly in favour of full cash wages, admitted that it would be difficult to persuade workers to pay for something that they obtained, or perceived to obtain, for free³.

Wage differentials

Having identified the broad pattern of wage movements, and accepted that there are many weaknesses in the available data on wages, there are a number of important differentials that require examination, specifically those of occupation and sex.

Although Molland and Evans criticised the official statistics for simplifying the farm worker occupational groups, the availability of such statistics leaves the economic historian with little option but to follow them⁴. Table 12 relates the wages of cattlemen, shepherds and orramen to horsemen, the largest occupational group. From this it can be seen that orramen were consistently the lowest paid group, at around 5% below horsemen, and their pattern of wages follows the movements of those of horsemen. The low level of wages is not surprising given the fact that orramen tended not to work with livestock, and were generally considered to be involved in the least skilled and least responsible work.

More interesting patterns occur with the other two categories. Initially cattlemen have wages that are fairly similar to those of horsemen, but during the 1920s they experienced a consistent relative rise in wages, peaking

¹ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.32.

² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.131, with reference to Aberdeen and Kincardine.

³ *Reconstruction Committee. Report of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee. Evidence*, p.42, J.F.Duncan, SFSU.

⁴ Molland, R. and Evans, G., 'Scottish farm wages', p.221.

during the depression, and although this declines slightly during the thirties, their wages maintain a premium of at least 6% above those of horsemen. Shepherds were undoubtedly the highest paid workers in the pre-war period, but this position collapsed during the war, only to be re-established during the interwar years, peaking at 10% above the wages of horsemen in 1931, and thereafter falling to 7% by 1939. These two latter groups were involved primarily in livestock production and their wage movements follow the relative fortunes of sheep and cattle. During the 1914-21 boom, arable production was at a premium, therefore the relative wages of horsemen rose during the period; but they then fell back when Scottish agriculture reverted to concentration on livestock production, a pattern that was reinforced during the depression of the 1930s.

Table 12: Index of occupational wage differentials for adult males, 1907-39

Year	Horsemen	Cattlemen	Shepherds	Orramen
1907	100	98	104	96
1919	100	98	96	94
1924-5 ^a	100	102	102	N/A
1931	100	108	110	96
1936	100	107	109	95
1939	100	106	107	95

^a Figures for 1924-5 are for married men only, all other years are for all males.

Source: Calculated from; *Report of an enquiry by the Board of Trade into the earnings and hours of labour of workpeople of the United Kingdom. V - agriculture in 1907* (P.P.1910, LXXXIV, Cd.5460), p.xxii; *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), pp.67-70; SRO, AF 59/38, *Wages of ploughmen and shepherds (collective agreements), 1933-5*; PRO, MAF 38/816, *Agricultural wages costs: Scotland, 1943-5*.

So far the discussion on wages has concentrated on males. Wage data for females is scarce, which is unfortunate given the importance of women in the regular labour force. Nearly all the statistical sources utilised so far, including the wage supplements published by the BOAS from 1924, specifically excluded women. The only survey that did include women was

that undertaken by the Board for the 1921 report by Sir James Wilson. Table 13 presents some comparative statistics from his data.

Table 13: Women's wages relative to men's in 1919, shillings per week

Area	Orramen's Wage	Women's Wage	Women as % of Orramen
SCOTLAND	46/2	26/2	56.7
South-East	45/1	26/6	58.8

South-East = East Lothian, Roxburgh and Berwick

Source: *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), pp.70-72

Orramen being the least skilled and lowest paid of the regular male groups, were taken as the most likely substitutes for female labour, a comparison which works least well in the South-West, but quite well in the South-East. The comparison is unlikely to be very accurate, the only definite conclusion that can be drawn is that female wages were somewhere between a half and two-thirds of males' wages. For the pre-war period, only the figures of Molland and Evans are readily available; they estimated that in 1899 women were paid at 64.7% of the lesser skilled adult male wage. However, a direct comparison with the above table is unwise, as, firstly, Molland and Evans deal with the North-East only. Secondly, their calculations are for cash wages only, if cash wages are used for the data in Table 13 then the percentages work out at 59.4% for Scotland and 64.2% for the South-East, which is much closer to the Molland and Evans figure. The reason is that men were accredited with a higher level of perquisites, particularly in the South-East where the family hiring system operated¹. In the South-West (Ayr, Lanark, Renfrew and Dumbarton) a comparison between female wages and cattlemen resulted in a figure of 60.7%. Cattlemen were chosen for the comparison because most regular women were employed in dairy production. The 1920 Report of the Committee on Women in Agriculture in Scotland commented on the complete lack of wage data; and, with reference to female out-workers, had the following conclusion to make:

¹ *ibid*, p.224.

'The area of wages of out-workers generally, compared with those in other industries and with the present cost of living, is low. The difference between the wages of men and women in Agriculture is very marked; there are indications that women are questioning the equity of this great discrepancy, especially, perhaps, in the south-eastern counties, where the kind of work done by women is most closely comparable to that done by men. It would seem that the employment of farm servants' daughters and the family system of engagement have tended to keep women's wages down, the extreme instance being the low rate of wages of Wigtownshire. Some farmers in evidence said that they give a bonus to a man whose family could supply women workers, but asserted that this made no difference to the women's pay. This is true in so far that such women are not paid at a lower rate than women hiring independently; but it is probable that the women's wage-level is determined by the custom of family hiring, and that this adversely affects the wage of the independent worker. The fact that many of the women do not attend the hiring-fairs or make their own bargains, has also probably a lowering effect on women's wages.'¹

Despite the lack of consistent statistics on women's wages, comments are sometimes made on their levels in the BOAS wage reports from 1924, and in articles submitted by Sir James Wilson and the BOAS to the *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*. Of the two major female employing areas, the most consistent set of figures is for the South-East, and the trends of these and the wages of orramen are given in the Table 14. It demonstrates that for most of the interwar period women managed to maintain wages at two-thirds or more of male wages. The high percentages during the mid 1930s were achieved when male rates were falling while female rates remained relatively static, and, despite the relative decline in 1937 when male wages rose again, women may well have achieved a significant long-term increase in their relative remuneration. Information for wages in the South-West was much more sparse, and the results saw wide statistical variations ranging from 61.1 % (1924 Ayr) to 90.5% (1932 South Ayr). This time the comparisons were with cattlemen's wages; no broad trends were discernible and it was difficult to tell how representative the figures for individual counties for single years were. Women remained much more poorly paid than men, a situation that was repeated throughout the rest of the economy².

¹ BOAS, *Report of the committee on women*, pp.14-15.

² Although not entirely comparable, female weekly earnings were about half of those of men throughout other industries in Britain; Hatton, T.J. and Bailey, R.E., 'Household labor supply and women's work in interwar Britain' *Explorations in Economic History*, 30 (1993), p.233.

Table 14: Women's wages in the South East, 1919/20-1937, shillings per week

Year	Counties	Orramen	Women	Women as % of Orramen
1919-20	B	45/10	26/0	56.8
1920-21	B	49/10	32/3	64.9
1924	R, B, E, M	36/1	23/0	63.7
1925	R, B, E, M	37/3	24/0	64.3
1926	R, B, E, M	35/5	24/0	67.8
1929	M, E, W	35/0	25/0	71.4
1930	M, E, W, P	35/6	23/6	66.2
1931	M, E, W, P	35/6	23/6	66.2
1932	M, E, W, P	35/6	23/6	66.2
1933	W	31/9	21/0	66.0
1934	M, E, W, P	32/6	23/6	72.3
1935	M, E, W, P	32/3	23/6	72.8
1936	M, E, W, P	33/2	24/6	73.8
1937	M, W, E, P	36/1	20-25/6	55.4-70.6

Counties: B-Berwickshire; E-East Lothian; M-Midlothian; P-Peebles; R-Roxburgh; W-West Lothian.

Source: Wilson, J., 'Wages of farm-workers in 1920-1921' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 4 (1921), pp.186-199; 'Farm wages and working hours in Scotland in summer 1924' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 7 (1924), pp.422-426; 'Farm wages and working hours in Scotland in summer 1925' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 8 (1925), pp.430-434; 'Farm wages in Scotland in summer 1926' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 9 (1926), pp.401-405; regular notices on wages in the *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 12-20 (1929-37); BOAS, *Supplement to the monthly agricultural report - agricultural wages in Scotland, Martinmas 1923,...,Whitsunday 1937* (B/DOAS, Edinburgh, January and July 1924-1938)

A final figure for the period is available from calculations made by the Ministry of Agriculture during the 1940s, where they estimated female wages in Scotland to be 65.8% of those of general male workers in 1937-8, and 65.2% in 1938-9¹. However, compared to the late eighteenth and nineteenth

¹ PRO, MAF 38/816, *Agricultural wage costs: Scotland, 1943-5*, Letter from Darke to Heath 13 June 1944, Table 'Scotland. Estimated agricultural labour bill', calculated from the wage figures for general workers and women & girls.

centuries, significant relative gains had been made, since at that time female wages were about one-half of those of male¹.

Demand and supply in the labour market

Having examined the patterns of employment in detail, the issue remains of the macroeconomic balance within the labour market, the main question being whether the 'Devine' model for the nineteenth century is consistent with the balance between demand and supply in the labour market of the early twentieth century.

Certainly there is much to suggest that it was, up to 1914. Conspicuous in its absence is any evidence of unemployment in agricultural areas, if anything, there was a scarcity in certain regions. Here are two comments by reporters for the Royal Commission on Labour during the mid 1890s on two different areas, first the North and South-West, and secondly for the South-East:

'Over the whole of my districts from Orkney to Wigtown the evidence showed that either in one class of labour or another the supply of hands required for agricultural operations was insufficient, and that generally the number of labourers had decreased.'²

'Among the rural population of the Lothians there is a conspicuous absence of pauperism. What is known as pronounced want or starvation, that is where a family or individual has not sufficient for his or their daily requirements of food, really does not exist. There are none who live from hand to mouth or from day to day, for all are in regular and continuous service and paid accordingly.... People seldom remain long out of employment, unless in delicate health. There is no congestion of labourers or lack of opportunities for earning daily bread. Persons unwilling to work drift away to the towns, where they may be seen lounging about, hands in pockets, or standing in little knots at the street corners.'³

Actual shortages of male labour were reported in Ayr, Renfrew, Linlithgow, Stirling, Dumbarton, and west Fife⁴. There was, also, a continual complaint of a lack of female labour in all areas, indicating a strong dislike of farmwork generally, and a preference for migration into other occupations, mainly in

¹ Morgan, V., 'Agricultural wage rates in late eighteenth-century Scotland' *Economic History Review*, 24 (1971), p.197; Devine, T.M., 'Women Workers', p.119.

² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.12.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.122.

⁴ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.12-16; Pt.II, p.9.

urban areas¹. The openings for female labour were varied and depended on the local economy; domestic service was popular in the Lothians, and textile mills in the Borders². For the men, mining, shipbuilding, railways, and iron and steel, were all mentioned as competitors for labour close to industrial areas, even as far distant as Wigtown there were complaints of general rural depopulation³. However, it would be wrong to paint a picture of general shortages of farm labour, and many areas reported a satisfactory balance between demand and supply, particularly those some distance from major urban areas. Given the age distribution of the farmworking population, this is not surprising, as without such labour flows there would have been a surplus of workers. The reasons for migration may have been the appeal of urban life as much as the prospect of better remunerated employment:

'There is...much drudgery and very little excitement about the farm servant's daily duties, and I believe the young men dislike the former and long for the latter. By the labourers themselves, slight importance is attached to the healthy character of country life in comparison with various branches of town labour. That phase of questions sinks into insignificance in their estimation, and only the shorter hours, numerous holidays, and present buzz, bustle and excitement of town life or the neat uniform and genteel work of the police constable or railway porter, are present to the mind of our young farm servant.'⁴

'...the chief cause of the abstention of women from farm work would seem to be the animation and variety of town life. With the general improvement of the domestic household of the married farm servant, the greater sense of refinement, and very general advice in education, young women feel ill-disposed to follow in the steps of their predecessors and engage in the rather rough though generally healthy requirements of Scottish farms.'⁵

Nevertheless, the attraction of the possibility of higher wages should not be underestimated. For instance, in his recent study of late nineteenth century migration in England, Friedlander has concluded that the primary motivating force behind rural-urban migration was wage differentiation⁶.

¹ Such comments are littered over all the lowland reports for Scotland; see, for example, *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, pp.13-14.

² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.48 and 196-197.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, pp.46; Pt.I, p.64 and 82; for Wigtown see comments by W.McConnell, farmer, to the *Royal Commission on the Agricultural Depression. Minutes of evidence*, IV (P.P.1896, XVII, Cd.8021), p.258.

⁴ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.10.

⁵ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.141.

⁶ Friedlander, D., 'Occupational structure, wages, and migration in late nineteenth-century England and Wales' *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 40 (1992), p.315;

The role of emigration in the 1890s was rather more limited, with a contemporary report for the Lothians concluding 'that among persons brought up to country life and work as the farm labourers...have been, there is apparently no fancy for emigration to foreign countries.'¹ This is confirmed by the statistics on emigration which show that the 1890s were a particularly poor decade for Scottish emigrants. Historians have concluded that the proportion of skilled and professional persons amongst migrants tended to increase and that of manual workers decline, as overall emigration rates fell².

Therefore, the farm worker benefited from a continual demand for his/her labour from urban areas at an acceptable alternative wage. During the decade and a half prior to the outbreak of the First World War, these conditions remained broadly in place, thus vindicating the 'Devine' model, although the balance between the different factors often changed in the short term³.

For a qualitative guide to the patterns of macroeconomic change, there are the annual reports made by the Board of Trade on the state of the Scottish agricultural labour market; they indicate that the general shortage of female labour continued right up to 1914. This suggests a long term problem, since such shortages were noted for the 1890s, and probably explains why, by the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, relative wage gains had been made by women compared with earlier periods. Male wages appear to have been rising 1900-1, and then to have remained relatively stationary from 1902-3 up until 1912 (except in the North-East where wages were rising from 1909 onwards). By 1913, when there was a distinct upward movement in wages, emigration was identified as one of the prime causal factors⁴. Emigration

however it has also recently been suggested that nominal urban-rural wage gaps tend to be overestimated, see Hatton, T.J. and Williamson, J.G., 'Wage gaps between farm and city: Michigan in the 1890s' *Explorations in Economic History*, 28 (1991), pp.381-408. For a discussion of the factors affecting rural-urban migration in Wales see Howell, D.W., 'The agricultural labourer', pp.266-269.

¹ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.23.

² Baines, D., *Emigration from Europe*, p.10 Table 3; Brock, J.M., 'The importance of emigration', p.106.

³ The traditional problem of surplus labour in much of rural England had also disappeared by 1900; Thompson, F.M.L., 'An anatomy of English agriculture, 1870-1914' in B.A.Holderness and M.Turner (eds.), *Land, labour and agriculture, 1700-1920. Essays for Gordon Mingay* (Hambleton, London, 1991), p.217.

⁴ *Annual reports on changes in rates of wages and hours of labour in the United Kingdom*: 1900 (P.P.1901, LXXII, Cd.688), pp.xlvi-xiv; 1901 (P.P.1902, XCVI, Cd.1204), p.xxxix; 1902 (P.P.1903, LXVI, Cd.1562), p.xi; 1903 (P.P.1904, LXXXIX, Cd.2199), p.38; 1904 (P.P.1905, LXXVI, Cd.2674), p.38; 1905 (P.P.1906, CXII, Cd.3172), p.40; 1906 (P.P.1907, LXXX, Cd.3713), p.39; 1907 (P.P.1908, XCVIII, Cd.4255), p.39; 1908 (P.P.1909, LXXX, Cd.4713),

statistics confirm the 1900-14 period as the peak of Scottish emigration activity; in the years 1891-1900 the average annual rate per 1,000 population was 4.4, this rose to 9.9 in 1901-10, and 14.4 in 1913, the comparative statistics for England were 3.6, 5.5, and 7.6¹. Contemporary reports commented on the rising tide of emigration in the few years before 1914². The problem was worst in the North-East, where the separate hiring of single men encouraged them to leave their jobs and emigrate, favourite destinations being Canada, Australia and New Zealand³. The boom in emigration would explain the rise in wages reported by the Board of Trade and identified in the wage statistics above. Emigration was the crucial addition to the position in the 1890s and 1900s, tipping the balance of demand and supply in the workers' favour; and, if anything, the demand for urban labour rose at the same time as emigration peaked⁴.

'There has been a fairly steady stream of emigration from the rural districts of Scotland, rising at times into something of a torrent, such as we have just had within the last three or four years. It is interesting to note the counties from which emigration has been the greatest. By far the greatest emigration has taken place from the Counties of Elgin, Nairn, Banff and Aberdeen. This is probably accounted for by the fact that there are fewer industries in these districts and less chance for farm workers changing occupation within their own districts. It is in these Counties too that the largest number of Single men employed on the farms are to be found, while the fact that it is the custom there for the bulk of wages to be paid at the end of the six months, produces a system of involuntary saving which provides the young men with the necessary cash to pay for passage abroad....The emigration has been less in the counties South of this, where the wages are higher and where the opportunities of entering other employment are greater. Emigration has generally been to Canada, Australia coming next, and increasingly, and then, much behind these, New Zealand and the United States. Emigration

p.34; 1909 (P.P.1910, LXXXIV, Cd.5324), pp.28-29; 1910 (P.P.1911, LXXXIX, Cd.5849), pp.26-27; 1911 (P.P.1912-13, XCII, Cd.6471), pp.28; 1912 (P.P.1914, LXXX, Cd.7080), p.xxxii; 1913 (P.P.1914-16, LXI, Cd.7635), pp.xxviii-xxix.

¹ Baines, D., *Emigration from Europe*, p.10; Brock, J.M., 'The importance of emigration', pp.4-5.

² Scottish Land Enquiry Committee, *Scottish Land*, p.13.

³ *Report on the decline of the agricultural population*, pp.15-16; Hall, A.D., *A pilgrimage of British farming 1910-1912* (John Murray, London, 1914), pp.383, 390, 399 and 406; BAF, *Report on migration from rural districts in England and Wales* (HMSO, London, 1913), pp.5-6; *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1380, J.Rothney, General Secretary SFSU; *First report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board to consider and report on questions arising in connection with the reception and employment of the Belgian refugees in this country. Minutes of evidence* (P.P. 1914-16, VII, Cd. 7779), p.200, J.M.Hannah, Chairman SCA; BOAS, *Report of the committee on women*, p.7.

⁴ Applications to local urban distress committees fell dramatically 1908/9-1913/14; see *Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland as to the proceedings of distress committees in Scotland for the year ended 15th May 1914* (P.P.1914-16, XXI, Cd.7666), pp.2.

has helped to increase wages and has also contributed to the independence of the workers remaining. It is the case today all over Scotland that there is a scarcity of suitable men for the farms, and although there seems now to be slackening in emigration it is not likely that any large increase in the number of competent men will take place.¹

As was outlined earlier, the position during the war in terms of wages is somewhat muddled by the lack of national data; on the other hand, given the increased importance of agricultural production in wartime, there is a considerable amount of information on available labour supply. The supply of labour in Britain during the war has, in recent years, been the focus of a considerable amount of work by Dewey, who rightly dispelled the myth that British agriculture faced a sharply reduced supply of labour. His criticism was based on the inaccurate sampling made by the Board of Trade in their 'Z8' surveys of agricultural labour, which were significantly biased towards larger farms, particularly in Scotland². The result was that the surveys overestimated the changes in farm labour supply, because of the heavier reliance of larger farms on hired, as compared to family, labour, a fact demonstrated by the continuing ability of British agriculture to produce food at near pre-war levels³. Dewey's original calculations was based on England and Wales only, and his later book on British agriculture resulted in an automatic extension of these conclusions to Scotland⁴. This would have been acceptable had conditions in Scotland been the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom, but they were not. Despite the bias of the Z8 surveys, there is no reason to believe that they do not accurately demonstrate the patterns of change or their use for comparative analysis between different parts of Britain. Graphs 15-17 show the results of such a comparative analysis⁵.

¹ NLS, Duncan Papers, Acc. 5601/4 'Memorandum on the Scottish servants' c.1914, pp.9-10.

² Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture in the First World War* (Routledge, London, 1989), Appendix H.

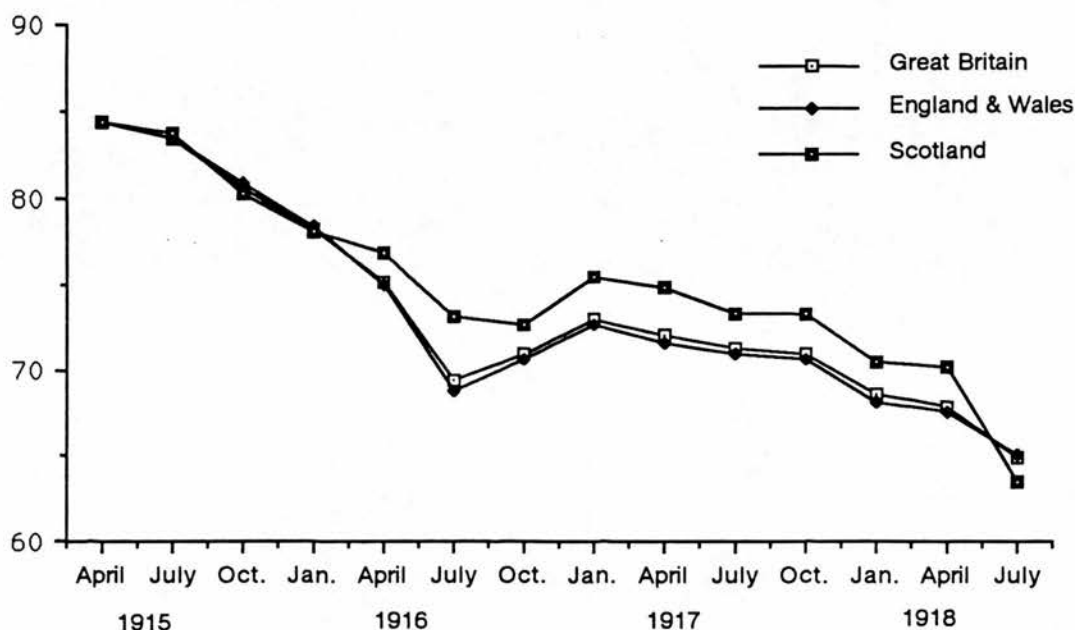
³ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, ch.4

⁴ Dewey, P.E., 'Agricultural labour supply in England and Wales during the First World War' *Economic History Review*, 28 (1975), pp.100-112; *idem*, 'Government provision of farm labour in England and Wales, 1914-18' *Agricultural History Review*, 27 (1979), pp.110-121; *idem*, *British agriculture*.

⁵ The 'Z8' surveys were undertaken by the Board of Trade between October 1914 and April 1919 in order to establish the impact of military enlistment on labour supply. *Report of the Board of Trade on the state of employment in the United Kingdom, in October 1914* (P.P.1914-6, XXI, Cd.7703), ...*in December 1914* (P.P.1914-6, XXI, Cd.7755), ...*in February 1915* (P.P.1914-16, XXI, Cd.7850); British Library of Political and Economic Science, Board

Graph 15

Impact of wartime enlistment on the population of regular male farm workers employed in July 1914 (July 1914 = 100)



Source: Board of Trade, 'Z8' Reports

Note: The vertical axis represents an index of the numbers of regular male farm workers employed in July 1914 (July 1914 = 100)

For enlistment (Graph 15) the pattern in Scotland was much the same as the rest of Britain until the introduction of conscription in 1916. Voluntary recruitment of farm workers was particularly heavy in the North-East, which prior to the war had a high proportion of single male workers, and this would explain the rise in real wages experienced in these areas during 1914-16¹. A gap then opened up in the numbers enlisted until July 1918. Why this occurred is unclear; during 1916 the Director of Recruiting placed blame on the lenient behaviour of Military Tribunals in Scotland, an accusation which was refuted by the Scottish Office who used the unpublished Labour Census

of Trade, Industrial (War Enquiries) Branch, 'Reports on the state of employment in the United Kingdom in July 1915 . . . October 1916'; *idem*, 'Reports on the state of employment in agriculture in Great Britain at the end of January 1917 . . . April 1919. For a general analysis of the 'Z8s' see Dewey, P.E., 'Military recruiting and the British labour force during the First World War' *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), pp.199-223.

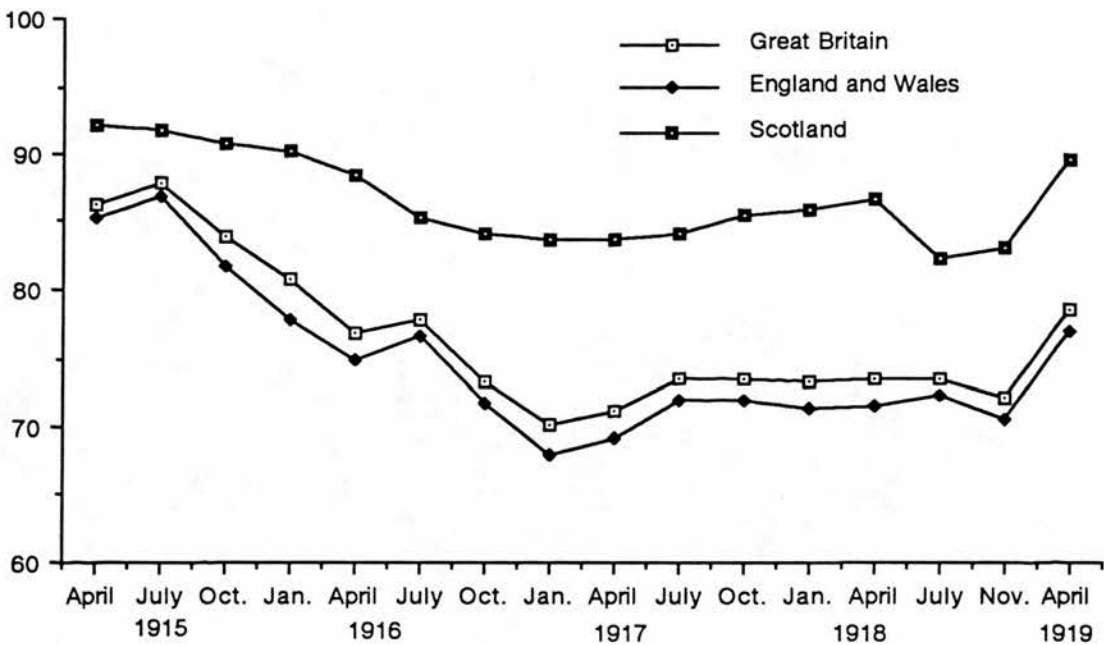
¹ Board of Trade, 'Report on the state of employment in the United Kingdom in July, 1915', Pt.II, p.8; Scottish Departmental Committee on food production, *Report on the question of maintaining and if possible increasing the present production of food in Scotland. Minutes* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1915), p.127, J.G.Robertson, Organising Secretary SFSU.

of 1916/17 to argue that there was less surplus labour available in Scotland than in England and Wales (five as compared to ten per cent)¹.

Increased enlistment during the second half of 1918 was a direct result of the call-up of workers in response to the Ludendorff Offensive; this accounted for over 15% of total enlistment of farm workers in Scotland, finally bringing Scottish enlistment to levels above those in the rest of Britain². In early summer 1918 Scotland filled 98.1% of its enlistment quota, compared with 77.8% for England and 47.7% for Wales, before the call-up was halted by the Cabinet in response to concern over the harvest³.

Graph 16

Index of numbers of permanent male farm workers, 1915-19 (July 1915=100)



Source: Board of Trade, 'Z8' Reports

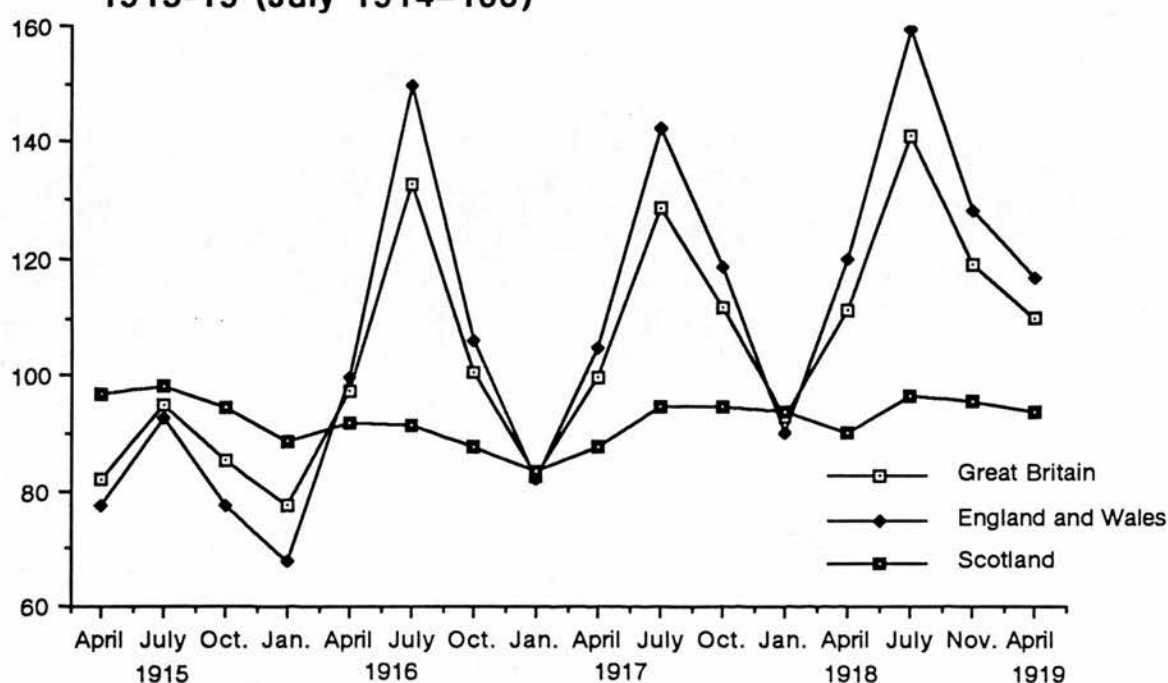
¹ SRO, HH 31/28, *Recruiting, appeals tribunals, conscientious objectors, agricultural workers, 1915-24*, Box 3.

² Board of Trade, 'Report on the state of employment in agriculture in Great Britain at the End of July 1918', p.2 and 4.

³ PRO, NATS 1/641, *Agricultural labour in Scotland - claim for military labour, 1918*, Memorandum by the Minister of National Service 'Supply of soldier labour for the Harvest' 7 September 1918.

Graph 17

**Index of numbers of permanent female farm workers,
1915-19 (July 1914=100)**



Source: Board of Trade, 'Z8' Reports

The available supply of male farm workers in Scotland relative to the pre-war period was, however, much greater than in England and Wales (Graph 16); and this cannot merely be accounted for by the variation in enlistment alone (Graph 15). It remains unclear as to how Scottish agriculture was able to attract more replacement male labour, for those enlisted, than in England and Wales. Early on in the war the Z8 surveys identify higher agricultural wages as reducing the attractiveness of working in industry in Scotland¹, but as noted earlier real cash wages were falling up to 1916-17 and afterwards remained relatively static. In addition, the numbers of women employed did not increase. Scotland experienced a small decline in its female agricultural labour force, compared to an increase in England and Wales by 1916-18 (Graph 17).

It must be emphasised that the Graphs 15-17 are for 'permanent' workers only, and therefore do not include many of the replacement workers identified by Dewey², for example soldier labour³. Overall, Dewey estimated

¹ Board of Trade, 'Report on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in April, 1915', Pt.II, p.13; in July 1915, Pt.II, p.7.

² Dewey, P.E., 'Agricultural labour supply'.

that the supply of 'conventional' labour in England and Wales' fell by 11% at the most, therefore one must conclude that the reductions in Scottish agriculture were less, though Dewey does take account of farmers and family labour as well as hired labour¹.

Although the prime focus of the thesis is permanent hired labour, some attention needs to be paid to the possible temporary labour replacements that Scottish farmers turned to during the war². By 1918 some 14,000 prisoners-of-war were being used in England and Wales for farmwork, but the number of POWs working in Scotland was described as 'negligible'³. The Womens Land Army in Scotland provided a small number of workers, approximately in line with the numbers employed in England and Wales⁴. Soldier labour was substantial during spring cultivation (1917 1,850; 1918 6,000) and summer harvests (1917 3,000; 1918 10,000)⁵. Other efforts at raising labour under various volunteer and other schemes organised by the Ministry of National Service were relatively ineffective in Scotland⁶. Figures for school children were not published, as they were in England and Wales⁷, though it was reported that in July 1915 local education authorities were being more accommodating than south of the border⁸.

The overall conclusion appears to be that Scotland suffered less of a reduction in its general male labour supply than the rest of Britain; though female employment numbers fell, due primarily to the heavy involvement of female labour already in 1914 and the attraction of employment elsewhere as the economy rapidly reached full employment. The problem for Scottish

³ Board of Trade, 'Report of the state of employment in agriculture in Great Britain at the end of January 1918', p.2.

¹ Dewey, P.E., 'Agricultural labour supply', p.104.

² These sources of labour have received a considerable amount of attention in other studies, Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, ch.9; *idem*, 'Government provision of farm labour'; Horn, P., *Rural life in England in the First World War* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1984), chs.5-7.

³ Board of Trade, 'Report of the state of employment in agriculture in Great Britain at the end of April 1918', p.3. Dewey reported 600 in 1918, *British agriculture*, p.147 fn.158.

⁴ PRO, NATS 1/641, *Agricultural labour in Scotland - claim for military labour, 1918*, Memorandum by the Minister of National Service 'Supply of soldier labour for the Harvest' 7 September 1918, estimated that the WLA were providing 1,000 in Scotland in August 1918. Dewey allowed for 8,000 in England and Wales in 1918, he mistakenly believed that the WLA was not active in Scotland, see Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, p.146 fn.133.

⁵ Dewey, P.E., 'Agricultural labour supply', p.104; *idem*, *British agriculture*, pp.146-7 fn.158

⁶ See comments in PRO, NATS, 1/640, *Agriculture. Labour for Scotland. Scheme for, 1917-18*, Internal memo to Mr.Rey 22 May 1918; NATS 1/641, *Agricultural labour in Scotland - claim for military labour, 1918*, comments on memos by Mr.Munro and Mr.Allen 2 August 1918.

⁷ *Employment of schoolchildren - summary of returns by county L.E.A.s, 1914-15* (P.P.1914-16, I, Cd.7881 and 7932); *1916* (P.P.1916, XXII, Cd.8202, 8302 and 8171).

⁸ Board of Trade, 'Report on the state of employment in the United Kingdom in July, 1915', pp.7-8.

agriculture was its pre-war reliance on large numbers of skilled labour, and unrestricted recruitment early on in the war, plus the uncertain and changing categorisation of protected workers from 1916, meant that individual farms could easily find themselves short of horsemen, cattlemen or shepherds.

'The chief difficulty seems to have been the scarcity of shepherds, who require years of training, and are not easy to replace. More skilled horsemen and stockmen of all kinds were also needed in many parts of the country....But the complaint even here is far less than in England of the insufficient *number* of labourers obtainable and far more the inferior *quality* at the high rates of pay now prevailing.'¹

Despite these shortages, those who remained on the land saw the real value of their cash wages eroded by accelerating inflation.

The immediate post-war boom (1919-21) resulted in the continuation of the complete absence of unemployment in rural areas. 1920 was a highpoint of real wage gains for the Scottish farm worker, the general belief amongst contemporaries was that the scarcity of labour, particularly for women, would not disappear quickly².

The slump of 1921 brought a rapid end to this 'golden' period for farm workers, but, despite the economic problems of the 1920s, farm labour was not affected by any significant rises in unemployment. There was a 5-10% cut in real wages as a result of the short-term problems facing agriculture and a reduction of urban employment opportunities. However, the problems for agriculture were not as serious as in some other sectors. This is demonstrated by the stability in total employment levels (Graph 5) and the gradual rise in wages from 1922 to 1927 (Graph 11). Evidence to the 1926 Inter-Departmental Committee on Agricultural Unemployment Insurance from both the workers' and the farmers' sides led to the conclusion that there was little, if any, unemployment. In addition, the Scottish Board of Health

¹ *ibid*. See also Scottish Departmental Committee on food production, *Report on the question of maintaining and if possible increasing the present production of food in Scotland. First report* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1915), p.6; *Minutes*, p.119, M.Wallace, farmer, Dumfries; p.125, C.B.Scruby, Labour Exchange Divisional Officer; p.4, J.M.Ramsay, BOAS Statistics and Intelligence Division; p.29, D.Ferrie, farmer, Perthshire.

² *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence I* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.345) p.116, Sir James Wilson. For comments on the supply of women see the BOAS, *Report of the committee on women*, p.57, 60, 70, 74, 97.

produced statistics to show that there were only 55 able-bodied persons in receipt of Poor Law relief in Scottish agricultural parishes in May 1925¹.

Overall then, the agricultural labour market continued to operate under the 'Devine' model. Emigration soon picked up to its pre-war levels, the rate for the 1920s being 9.2 per 1,000 of the population (Scotland now topped the European league of emigrant nations)². Agriculture was a major source of emigrants, accounting for 19% of Scottish adult male emigrants in the period 1924-6, but only 10.5% of the occupied male population in the 1921 Population Census³. Urban employment opportunities were probably more uncertain than pre-war, but, although the Scottish economy faced long-term structural problems, the indices of business activity continued to rise through the 1920s⁴. Unemployment amongst the insured labour force remained above 10%, but was nowhere near the high levels of the 1930s and was below that of other industrial areas such as Wales and the north-east and north-west of England⁵. Scottish agriculture was, as one commentator put it, 'a corridor to other occupations'⁶, with a continuing flow of young labour migrating to urban occupations or abroad. The maintenance of both migration and emigration levels ensured that a satisfactory equilibrium remained in the market for Scottish farm labour.

¹ MAF/Scottish Office, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on agricultural unemployment insurance* (HMSO, London, 1926), p.10, 12-13 and 87. The Board of Health defined agricultural parishes as those where the agricultural valuation on the Valuation Roll exceeded more than 50% of the total. Up to 1921 the able-bodied poor had not officially been entitled to poor relief, this was changed under the Poor Law Emergency Provisions (Scotland) Act. Agricultural workers were not covered by the national unemployment insurance scheme.

² Baines, D., *Emigration From Europe*, p.10.

³ Anon., 'Emigration of Scottish agricultural workers' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 10 (1927), p.341. See also comments in the Scottish Liberal Land Inquiry Committee, *The Scottish countryside*, pp.9-10. Migration to England was also of considerable importance; Lindsay, I., 'Migration and motivation: a twentieth-century perspective' in T.M. Devine (ed.), *Scottish emigration and Scottish society* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1992), p.156.

⁴ Some contemporary observers believed that the experience of war widened the horizons of many farm workers, increasing their propensity to migrate to urban areas:

'The changes in domicile amongst rural workers, which before the War, were confined within the same rural parish or within contiguous rural parishes have been considerably widened consequential upon the experiences of the younger generation arising out of the War and, as in part of wages, hours, and freedom, agricultural workers consider themselves to be worse off than most workers, the tendency since the War has been for the younger men to establish themselves in urban areas.' (SRO, AF 59/43, *Inquiry regarding decrease in number of men employed on farms, 1926*, Minute sheet comments by H.M.Conacher 30 September 1926).

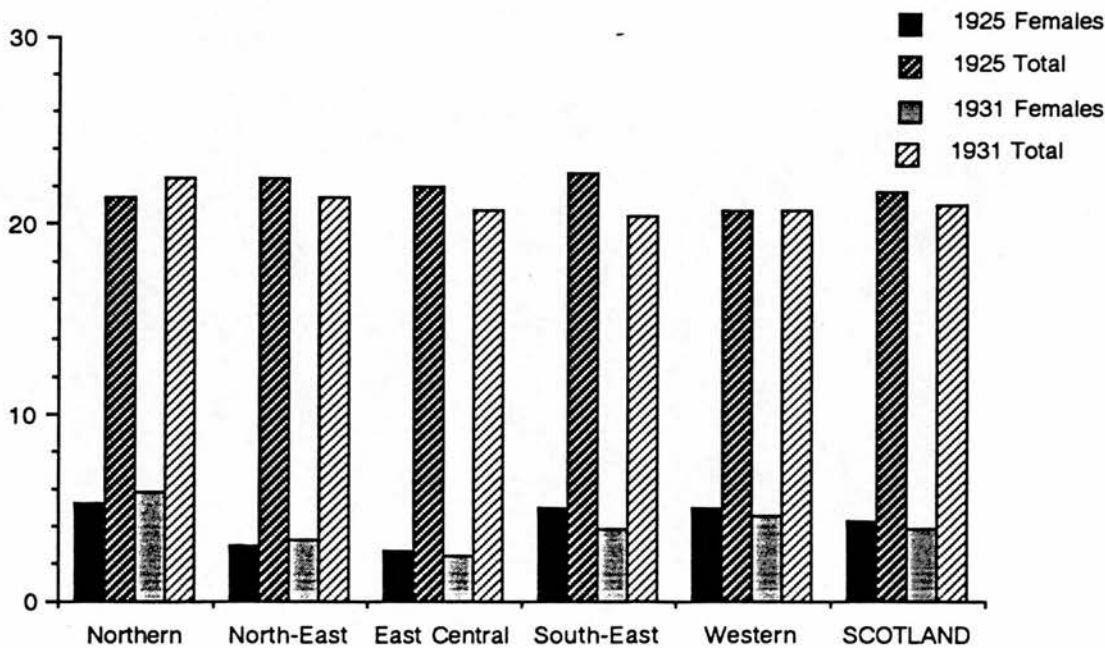
⁵ Lord Beveridge, *Full employment in a free society* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1967), p.61; Buxton, N.K., 'Economic growth in Scotland between the wars: the role of production structure and rationalization' *Economic History Review*, 33 (1980), p.541.

⁶ Duncan, J.F. 'The economic crisis and the farm worker' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 16 (1933), p.279.

Towards the end of the 1920s, the situation for Scottish agriculture was beginning to look less promising; agricultural prices were falling, and increased competition was being felt from grain and frozen meat imports. This was followed, in the early 1930s, by a massive general price deflation and a collapse in the markets for many agricultural products. The temporary result, in the labour market, was a significant rise in real wages (see Graph 12)¹. For farmers facing a situation of falling commodity prices and rising labour costs, the logical step was to cut hired labour (see Graph 5). Graph 18-19 show the employment levels in Scottish agriculture in 1925 and 1931 per 1,000 acres by holding size and region. They demonstrate a general trend to reduce labour inputs, particularly on large farms in the South-East (whose primary products were grain and sheep); note that the Western dairy region did not experience any labour cut and the highland Northern region actually recorded an increase in employment.

Graph 18

Permanent labour employed per 1,000 acres, 1925 and 1931

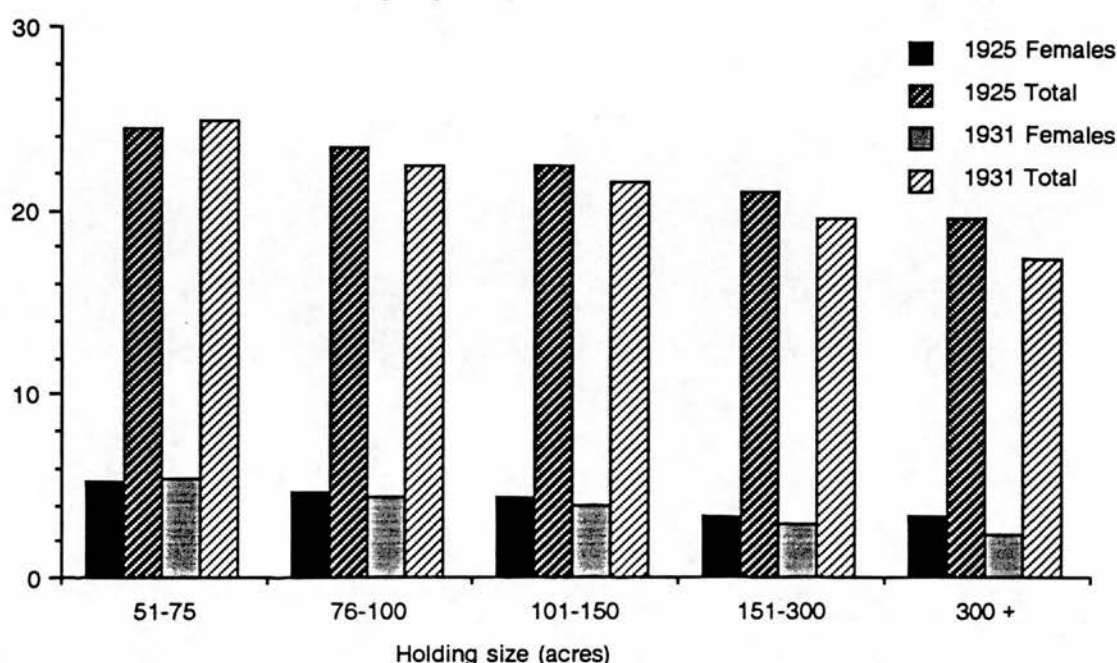


Source: The agricultural output of Scotland, 1925, p.90; 1931, p.75

¹ This rise in real wages was a result of 'sticky' wages, and was a general phenomenon throughout the British economy at the time. See Beenstock, M. and Warburton, P., 'Wages and unemployment'.

Graph 19

Permanent labour employed per 1,000 acres, 1925 and 1931



Source: The agricultural output of Scotland, 1925, p.91; 1931, p.76

The policy adopted was one of natural wastage through non-recruitment, for the reduction in numbers adversely affected males under the age of 21; women, often employed in less skilled work, were also laid off¹. Meanwhile, the traditional escape routes for the unemployed rural worker, migration to urban areas or abroad, were no longer open.

'There has been a remarkable change of opinion during the past five years. This is not so much the result of changes in the volume or character of employment in agriculture, as in the greater difficulty experienced by farm workers in securing other employment if they fail to secure a situation on a farm, and the great reduction in the opportunities for emigration. It is doubtful whether there has been any substantial increase in the number of workers who leave agricultural work every year, until the last two years. It is the lack of openings in industry at home, and in the Dominions and elsewhere that is bringing unemployment home to the experience of farm workers.'²

The Dominions, the main destinations for Scottish rural emigrants, rapidly closed the doors in order to protect their own workforces; in 1929 net

¹ *The agricultural output of Scotland, 1930* (P.P.1933-4, XXVI, Cd.4496), pp.45-46.

² *Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance. Evidence*, p.1080, J.F. Duncan, SFSU.

emigration to extra-European countries from Scotland stood at 33,864, by 1932 it had fallen to -13,179¹. Over the same period the level of business activity fell by 22% in Scotland and unemployment rose from 12.1% of the insured labour force to 27.7%². The 1931 Census gives the first statistical indication of unemployment levels amongst the agricultural population (Table 15).

Table 15: Numbers of farm workers 'out of work', 1931

Age	Grieves	Shepherds	in charge of Cattle	in charge of Horses	Others
14-15	0.0	2.3	1.0	2.0	5.7
16-17	0.0	4.0	1.4	0.8	9.5
18-20	0.0	2.8	2.8	1.6	11.7
21-24	1.5	1.9	2.5	1.5	12.4
25-29	0.8	1.3	2.8	2.2	10.5
30-34	0.8	1.9	2.4	1.7	9.5
35-44	0.9	1.7	2.5	1.6	9.5
45-54	1.4	2.3	3.0	3.3	11.0
55-59	2.4	4.0	5.2	4.3	16.3
60-64	2.9	6.8	5.0	13.0	18.8
65-69	3.5	9.0	5.3	13.8	21.5
70 & over	5.8	7.8	6.6	11.1	17.7
Total	1.5	3.0	2.7	2.3	11.2

Source: *Report on the fourteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1934), calculated from Tables 1 and 6

The first impression is that unemployment was not high amongst Scottish farm workers, particularly compared to the insured labour force figure of 26.6%³. Amongst the skilled workers, overall unemployment was 3% or

¹ Carrier, N.H. and Jeffery, J.R., *External migration: a study of the available statistics 1815-1950* (Studies on Medical and Population Subjects No.6, General Register Office, HMSO, London, 1953), p.93.

² Buxton, N., 'Economic growth', p.541.

³ Lord Beveridge, *Full employment in a free society*, p.61.

below, a percentage which any economist would accept as full employment, but for the less skilled (Others) it was significantly higher, 11.2%. Within this group it is not surprising to discover that those in their fifties and above are experiencing above average rates; however, the critical point concerns those in the 18-24 age groups. These were individuals who had now reached their entitlement to an adult wage; therefore, these statistics suggest that the group affected the most by cuts in the labour force were young adults and also the old, in less skilled groups.

During the early 1930s conditions proceeded to worsen. The Scottish agricultural price index experienced its worst falls in the years 1931/2-1932/3, and agricultural employment kept falling until 1933 (see Graph 5). This resulted in significant increases in rural unemployment. In 1929 the Department of Agriculture (DOAS) estimated that unemployment amongst regular farm servants stood at 1-2%, by 1934 the general rate in eastern counties, the worst affected, had risen to 5%, with estimates up to 20% being quoted for the North-East¹. Again, these figures may not sound very high when compared to general rates or to those quoted in the 1931 Census, but the 1931 Census may well have picked up many less-skilled workers whom the DOAS did not consider regular farm workers. For an industry that had for decades experienced negligible rates of unemployment, these levels provided a serious shock to the labour market². The decline in employment was only stopped by a dramatic fall in real wages from 1933 to 1936 (Graph 12).

Recently Hatton and Williamson have attempted an econometric examination of the relationship between agricultural employment and wages, and industrial employment and wages; for the depression period they looked at Australia, Canada, Denmark, the United States and New Zealand. They came to the following conclusion - sticky industrial wages contributed to high urban unemployment during the depression, high urban unemployment had an impact on agriculture, whose more flexible wages dropped in the face of a glutted labour market induced by a halt of rural-

¹ SRO, AF 43/339, *Agricultural workers unemployment insurance. Conference on extension of and Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance, 1929-31*, minutes of conference on extension of unemployment insurance to agriculture, 22-23 October 1929; AF 43/340, *Agricultural workers unemployment insurance. Conference on extension of and Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance, 1932-4*, Memo by DOAS 'Unemployment among agricultural workers in Scotland' March 1934.

² For a description of the position of the Scottish farm worker in 1933 see Duncan, J.F., 'The economic crisis', pp.275-282.

urban migration, thus causing the urban/rural wage gap to widen¹. The processes occurring in Scotland during the same period conform to such a model, with the addition of one variable, the curtailment of emigration. This ties in with comments made by Bellerby, who concluded that farmers in the United Kingdom saw their relative incomes increase in the 1930s due to increases in total factor income and 'substantial economies in hired labour'². In England and Wales farmers were forced to cut employment drastically since minimum wage controls prevented them from making substantial cuts in wages. In Scotland flexible wages allowed farmers, by the mid 1930s, to adopt a process of balancing the cuts between wages and employment³. Falling employment in Scotland was only halted by the decline in real wages from 1932.

Much of the problem for the farm worker was undoubtedly related to the long-term structural problems now facing the labour market, most notably in terms of emigration (which remained negative in net terms throughout the 1930s⁴), and the low demand for industrial labour. It was not until 1939 that the indices of business activity reached its 1929 level; similarly, insured unemployment remained above 15% until that year⁵. In 1936 the Committee on farm workers in Scotland concluded that, 'so far as male labour is concerned there is, in fact, a constantly emerging surplus.'⁶

With the imposition of the 1936 Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture) Act, statistics became available on the numbers unemployed in agriculture. Scottish unemployment was now slightly higher than overall British levels, though both were lower than the 1931 Census indicated. Table 16 shows a continuing small pool of unemployed labour (though the 1937 figure may well have been abnormally low⁷). Female rates were generally higher

¹ Hatton, T.J. and Williamson, J.G. 'Integrated and segmented labor markets: thinking in two sectors' *Journal of Economic History*, 51 (1991). p.424.

² Bellerby, J.R., *Agriculture and industry. Relative income* (Macmillan, London, 1956), pp.57 and 73-5.

³ Anthony, R., 'The Scottish agricultural labour market, 1900-1939: a case of institutional intervention' *Economic History Review*, 46 (1993), pp.567-568. In England and Wales the number of regular farm workers fell from 644,000 in 1929 to 511,000 in 1939 (Ministry of Agriculture and Department of Agriculture for Scotland, *A century of agricultural statistics*, p.62), a reduction of 21%; the corresponding fall in lowland Scotland was 12%.

⁴ Carrier, N.H. and Jeffery, J.R., *External migration*, p.93.

⁵ For a guide to the structural problems of the Scottish economy in the 1930s see Buxton, N.K., 'Economic growth', pp.538-555.

⁶ *Report of the Committee on farm workers*, p.16.

⁷ *Report of the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee in accordance with section 59 of the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1935, and section 8 of the Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture) Act, 1936, on the financial condition of the Unemployment Fund on the 31st December, 1937* (P.P.1937-8, XVIII), p.40.

because of the more seasonal nature of much female labour, especially female out-workers; though Scotland continued to employ its female labour on a more full-time basis, thus accounting for the significantly lower levels of female unemployment compared to England and Wales. The sudden rise in real wages in 1938 probably had more to do with the introduction of minimum wages (see Graph 12) than with any sudden jump in labour demand or general tightening of the labour market. The consequence was a marked drop in employment levels (see Graph 5), and a rise in those claiming unemployment benefit (Table 16).

Table 16: Average percentages unemployed under the farming and forestry section of the Agriculture Insurance Scheme, 1937-38

Country	Age/Sex	1937	1938
Scotland	Male 18-64	4.6	6.1
	Female 18-64	7.4	11.7
	Total 16-64	4.8	6.4
Great Britain	Male 18-64	3.7	5.1
	Female 18-64	13.5	20.1
	Total 16-64	4.0	5.7

Source: *Report of the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee in accordance with section 59 of the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1935, and section 8 of the Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture) Act, 1936, on the financial condition of the Unemployment Fund on the 31st December, 1937* (P.P.1937-8, XVIII), p.35; *on the 31st December 1938* (P.P.1938-9, XVIII), p.33.

Undoubtedly the Scottish agricultural labour market was, by the late 1930s, recovering from the shock of the depression. However, because of the significant structural problems facing the Scottish economy at home and abroad, the market for farm labour was now operating under different conditions from the experience undergone throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; most importantly, unemployment was now a possibility for individuals in rural areas. The traditional demand for labour in urban areas and abroad had been curtailed, leaving young Scottish farm workers with reduced opportunities in an industry that had relied on

shedding a considerable amount of its young labour. Thus the interwar period saw an end to the 'Devine' model, which had described the pattern of experience for the nineteenth century through to 1914. The 1920s appeared to mark a return to the behaviour of the pre-war years, but the major problems facing the Scottish economy, combined with worldwide depression in the 1930s, rapidly showed up the dependence of rural areas on established migration patterns. For a labour market that had seen so much security of employment for more than a century, the 1930s marked a major economic turning-point.

Chapter 4: The Role of institutions

The major structural changes in the Scottish agricultural labour market provoked a considerable amount of institutional interest and intervention during the early part of the twentieth century. With reference to Scottish farm labour, three main bodies were involved, the Board (later Department) of Agriculture for Scotland (B/DOAS), the National Farmers' Union of Scotland (NFUS), and the Scottish Farm Servants' Union (SFSU). Of the three, only the SFSU has received limited historical attention¹, and extensive examinations of all of them remain conspicuous by their absence. Only with a basic background analysis of the evolution of the three bodies can their policies and actions be placed in a correct perspective; in other words, institutional policy is as much a function of the internal mechanisms of institutions as the result of external forces.

Having undertaken a review of the development of the three main bodies, the chapter will then focus on a number of aspects which were considered important by the institutions themselves, and which had a major impact on the operation of the market for Scottish farm labour at a macroeconomic level. The most conspicuous of these were the various efforts to implement some form of collective bargaining in agriculture, including a sustained period of voluntary negotiations between the NFUS and the SFSU, and direct interventions by the state through the BOAS to enforce minimum wage settlements. In addition, as part of the general expansion of the welfare role of the state, farming was affected by the implementation of health and unemployment insurance schemes, to which the attitudes of the employers' association and the trade union varied considerably. The reasons behind such interventions and the policies developed by the NFUS and the SFSU will therefore be examined. Finally, and linked to the growing interest in public welfare, was the area of housing. Housing was not just a concern of welfare provision, it also formed an important part of the employment contract, since nearly all workers were accommodated in tied housing. Therefore considerations over this issue tended to spill over into the realm of

¹ Smith, J.H., *Joe Duncan: the Scottish farm servants and British agriculture* (R.C.S.S., University of Edinburgh, and Scottish Labour History Society, Edinburgh, 1973); Robertson, B.W., 'The Scottish farm servant and his union: from encapsulation to integration' in I. MacDougall (ed.), *Essays in Scottish labour history* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1978), pp.90-114.

national employment relations, as was demonstrated in the considerable debate that emerged in the interwar period over the state subsidisation of housing improvements and proposals and legislation to promote local authority housing provision in rural areas.

The Board of Agriculture for Scotland

Up to 1912, when the Board was created, agricultural affairs were officially the responsibility of the 'British' Board of Agriculture based in Whitehall. However, due to the general policy of laissez-faire towards farming, there was little constructive intervention in Scottish farming, except in the Highlands and Islands where the Congested Districts Board supervised legislation introduced to protect the rights of crofters and to encourage land settlement¹.

The BOAS emerged as the result of Liberal legislation to enhance the development of smallholdings in the Highlands, under the 1911 Small Landholders (Scotland) Act, a piece of legislation most closely associated with John Sinclair (later Lord Pentland, Secretary for Scotland 1905-12). The protection and promotion of crofters' rights was an emotive issue for Liberals, and this was regarded as the prime role for the Board on its establishment². Overall responsibility for agricultural issues in Scotland was not itself a major political issue, and was almost certainly included because the establishment of a Scottish Board would have created an administrative and legal anomaly if the Whitehall Board had maintained its jurisdiction over lowland Scotland³.

Some observers, with the benefit of historical hindsight, have regarded the establishment of the BOAS with rather nationalist eyes, as the first step towards the creation of an independent Scottish Office based in Edinburgh.

¹ DOAS, *The department and its work* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1937), p.1; Milne, D., *The Scottish Office and other Scottish government departments* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1957), pp.36 and 43.

² Milne, D., *The Scottish Office*, p.43; Gibson, J.S., *The thistle and the crown: a history of the Scottish Office* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1985), pp.39-42; Leneman, L., *Fit For heroes?: land settlement in Scotland after World War 1* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1989), ch.1. The 1911 Act resulted in a considerable amount of disagreement within the Liberal Party; for its political background see Brown, J., 'Scottish and English land legislation 1905-11' *Scottish Historical Review*, 47 (1968), pp.72-85.

³ The Board of Agriculture in Whitehall retained its central role in the prevention of animal diseases, since it was considered counter-productive to have two bodies supervising diseases which paid little adherence to national boundaries.

It is true that the Board was the first major state administrative body to be located in Edinburgh, the Scottish Office and the Scotch Education Department being based in London, but the BOAS was purely a creation to serve the desires of Liberal policy on smallholders rights, and the experience of crofting problems throughout the late nineteenth century demonstrated that a Scottish perspective was required¹. Any debate amongst Scotland's farming community only really came alive in 1911 when the passing of the Act was imminent, implying that the demands of agriculturists in lowland Scotland played no role in the setting up of the BOAS. Some felt that a Scottish Board would be of benefit, allowing closer attention to be paid to local conditions. However, opponents argued that handing over Scottish agricultural affairs to the Scottish Secretary would only weaken the voice of agriculture in government and Parliament.

'Our point against this [separate Board] is that British agriculture is one, and that it is no more sane to divorce the interests of Scottish agriculture from those of English agriculture than it would be to divorce the interests of Scotland and England in respect of shipping, mining, railways, or any other form of enterprise. The boundary line between the two systems of agriculture in Great Britain is not to be found at the Solway or Tweed, but much further north. No man can tell a difference between the agriculture of Lincoln and the agriculture of the Lothians; between the agriculture and dairying of Somerset and Cheshire on the one hand, and of the South-West of Scotland on the other; or between the agriculture and cattle-feeding interests of Norfolk on the one hand and those of Angus and Aberdeen and Banff on the other. The agriculture of this island is one, and its interests should be under one administrative control, with responsible Ministers in both Houses of Parliament. To give England a well-equipped Board of Agriculture, and leave Scotland and her agricultural interests to the tender mercies of the Scottish Office, is not statesmanship; it is simply political dodging, and while it may conduce to some political end, it cannot benefit the premier industry. What is wanted is a thoroughly well-equipped and liberally-endowed Board of Agriculture for Great Britain. Such a body should have a branch or sub-office in Edinburgh for administrative purposes, and should at all costs retain the full control and administration of the various Acts affecting diseases in stock, and the transit of stock from one point to another. Schemes of land reform should be kept distinct from administrative work. There is no necessary link between the two.'²

¹ Gibson, J.S., *The thistle and the crown*, p.42.

² *Scottish Farmer*, 11 March 1911 p.201. The debate can also be followed in its letter columns during 1911, see pp.27, 47, 71, 95, 139, 203 and 253.

Once established, the BOAS did not impinge heavily on the interests of lowland agriculture, the only complaints being of the cost of the new body¹. Land settlement issues predominated through the 1910s and 1920s, though official histories give the incorrect impression that this was all that the BOAS was really concerned with, in conjunction with a growing commitment to education and research². The main criticisms that appeared were administrative. In 1914, the Royal Commission on the Civil Service attacked the Scottish Boards in general (Agriculture, Fisheries, Local Government, and Lunacy and Prisons), for being inefficient and encouraging political patronage. Their main complaint was that the Scottish Secretary had the right to appoint the top administrative figures in all the Boards, without reference to the standard practice of competitive examinations for the Civil Service³. In addition, both the Royal Commission, and the later 1937 Committee on Scottish Administration, felt that the Boards were too independent and that they lacked both ministerial and parliamentary accountability⁴.

The administrative independence of the BOAS was partly a result of a deliberate policy to make sure that the Board was not under the absolute control of the Scottish Office at the time of the 1911 Act, with the Scottish Secretary having only the right to approve certain functions and issue general instructions and regulations⁵. In financial matters, the BOAS was answerable directly to the Treasury⁶.

There is, however, little evidence, of clashes between the BOAS and the Scottish Office. The Board essentially behaved as the state institution responsible for Scottish agricultural matters, seeing its prime role as administering legislative provisions and government policy. When the issues of labour supply and collective bargaining arose during the First World War, the BOAS was regarded as the automatic focus of attention by farmers,

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 13 July 1912 p.629.

² Milne, D., *The Scottish Office*, pp.43, 54 and 214-5; Gibson, J.S., *The thistle and the crown*, pp.64 and 86-7. Land settlement and crofting have received considerable attention by historians, see Hunter, J., *The making of the crofting community* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1976), ch.11, and *The claim of crofting: the Scottish Highlands and Islands, 1930-1900* (Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1991), chs.1-2; Leneman, *Fit for heroes?*, chs.1-3.

³ *Fourth report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service* (P.P. 1914, XVI, Cd.7338), p.78.

⁴ *Report of the Committee on Scottish administration* (P.P.1936-7, XV, Cd.5563), p.11.

⁵ *Report of the Committee on Scottish administration*, p.14-15.

⁶ Gibson, J.S., *The thistle and the crown*, p.66.

workers, and government departments¹. The Ministry of Labour accepted that its role was to be limited to the operation of employment exchanges, health and unemployment benefits, and the specific provisions of the 1919 Industrial Courts Act², though it did expect to be consulted over any matters that arose concerning labour disputes³.

Senior administrators within the BOAS were chosen directly for their ability to enforce policy and legislation, especially with reference to the emotive issue of land settlement. Under the 1911 Act, three Commissioners, one of whom was to be chairman, were to run the Board. Of the three Commissioners, only one, Robert Greig, had any experience of civil service employment as an Education Inspector. All of them had considerable expertise in agriculture; Robert Wright (the chairman) was Principal of the West of Scotland College of Agriculture, Greig had an academic background as a Lecturer at Aberdeen University, and John Sutherland (Commissioner for Small Holdings) had specific knowledge of the legal and economic framework of Scottish estates as both a solicitor and estate factor. However, the Secretary (H.M.Conacher) and Assistant Secretary (Charles Weatherhill) were both professional civil servants; therefore the Board was a mix of agricultural and administrative expertise⁴. This team dominated the Board until the early 1920s.

Contemporary judgement of the Board's activities was relatively favourable. In 1919 editorials in the *Scottish Farmer* praised the work of the BOAS and the abilities of Wright as an administrator⁵. Nevertheless, the Board was not without its critics, and faced attacks over two main issues during this period; labour recruitment and supply in 1918, and land settlement in 1921. The first was basically out of the hands of the Board. As was noted in chapter 3, there was a sudden increase in enlistment levels in mid-1918. However, the anger

¹ PRO, LAB 2/979/3, *Responsibility for agricultural labour, 1919*, War Cabinet Memo by the Secretary for Scotland, 'Agricultural labour', 20 September 1919.

² PRO, LAB 2/978/18, *Responsibility for agricultural labour in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, 1919-20*, Draft statement to the Cabinet Committee on Home Affairs agreed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Ministry of Labour, the BOAS and the Irish Department of Agriculture, January 1920.

³ PRO, LAB 2/978/3, *Power of the department to settle agricultural disputes, 1921*, Conciliation staff memorandum no.125, 28 September 1921.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated all information concerning Board/Departmental staff comes from: *Appendix to the third report on the Civil Service, minutes of evidence* (P.P.1913, XVIII, Cd.6740), pp.153-4; *Who was who, I-VII* (A. & C.Black, London, 1920-81); *Scottish biographies, 1938* (E.J.Thurston, London, n.d.). For a full list and information on the Board in 1912 see *First report of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland for 1912* (P.P.1913, XVI, Cd.6757), pp.iv-v.

⁵ *Scottish Farmer*, 14 June 1919 p.559, 13 December 1919, p.1223.

produced amongst Scottish farmers unleashed a series of smouldering issues that had been underlying the Board's wartime activities.

'The action of the Board has in several matters been singularly inept, and one is compelled to admit that it has shown itself incompetent in dealing with problems connected with prices of produce and kindred topics. It lacks driving power, and those who are members of some of the advisory committees bear testimony to a marked difference between the independent attitude assumed by representatives of the Irish Department [of Agriculture] and the meek and mild please-let-me-live attitude of the representatives of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland, when dealing with administrative committees and departments having their headquarters in London....

....At the moment, undoubtedly, the failure to stand up to the National Service Department, and to realise the true position of Scotland with respect to inequality of sacrifice for military service has wetted adverse criticism of the Board and its ways.'¹

Some of this criticism was undoubtedly warranted,. On the specific issue of labour, the BOAS persuaded the Scottish Secretary (Munro) to intervene in the War Cabinet. There was little more they could be expected to do².

The Board's concentration of time and resources on land settlement came under considerable scrutiny in 1921, a period of keen examination of public finances. The BOAS was attacked both in parliament and in the farming press for wasting public money; and when the retirement of Wright was announced in the summer of 1921 it was indirectly linked to criticisms of the Board³. However, the new commissioners appointed in the early 1920s did not mark a dramatic break from the past. Robert Greig took over as chairman in 1921, and the two new appointments in 1922, James Wood and James Mather, combined academic expertise and experience of estate administration and the civil service, both having 'close first-hand acquaintance with practical agriculture'⁴. This combination of academic and practical administrative backgrounds continued to dominate throughout the 1920s. In 1929, when under the Reorganisation of Offices (Scotland) Act, 1928, the Board became the Department of Agriculture for Scotland (DOAS), the Secretary (Greig) and his four assistants (Caie, Conacher, Mather and Weatherhill), had all been patronage appointments rather than professional

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 13 July 1918, p.517.

² PRO, NATS 1/641, *Agricultural labour in Scotland. Claim for military labour, 1918*; NATS 1/640, *Agriculture. Labour for Scotland. Scheme for, 1917-18*.

³ *Scottish Farmer*, 6 August 1921, p.915.

⁴ *Scottish Farmer*, 7 January 1922, p.8.

civil service promotions¹. However a significant change in policy had been marked, with the definite abandonment of the policy of extensive land settlement, and the promotion of education and research, livestock improvement, and agricultural co-operation².

The 1928 Act was intended to tie the Department more closely to the Secretary of State and, ultimately, Parliament, though the DOAS was in no way subordinated to the Scottish Office and its functions were not officially placed in the hands of the Secretary of State until 1939³. The creation of the Department, however, did affect a policy of recruiting its chief administrators through traditional sources (Civil Service examination and promotion) rather than through patronage⁴, a need fuelled partly by the increasingly interventionist nature of agricultural policy during the 1930s, and the growing diversity of the Department's responsibilities. Such a policy was most clearly demonstrated by the appointment as Greig's successor in 1934 of Patrick Laird, who had entered the Scottish Office through the examination in 1912. As time went by the earlier appointees retired to be replaced by professional civil servants. In addition, the Board/Department lost its nominal independence, and external criticisms of its broad direction fell away as agricultural interests increasingly concentrated on lobbying the politicians, in particular the Secretary of State. The 1937 Committee on Scottish Administration gave the DOAS a clean bill of health, and recommended that the Department's practice of having a liaison officer based at the Scottish Office in London should be expanded to other departments. It felt the main problem was that the Secretary of State, based in London, was effectively cut off from the administration of many of his responsibilities⁵.

National Farmers' Union of Scotland

Prior to the founding of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland (NFUS) in 1913, attempts to organise farmers into an effective political group were

¹ *Seventeenth report of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland for 1928* (P.P.1928-9, V, Cd.3293), p.8.

² *Scottish Farmer*, 11 April 1925, p.465.

³ *Report of the Committee on Scottish administration*, pp.15-16; Milne, D., *The Scottish Office*, p.215.

⁴ *Report of the Committee on Scottish administration*, p.81.

⁵ *Report of the Committee on Scottish administration*, pp.19-20, 38 and 42-3.

limited. As in England and Wales, agricultural clubs and societies concentrated on the improvement of farming techniques and the organisation of shows¹. Political considerations were part of the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture's (SCA) remit; but the Chamber had a very mixed membership (tenants, landowners, factors, lawyers, etc.), and was essentially a body to provide a central focus for the many local chambers of agriculture that existed at that time. Membership of the SCA throughout the early twentieth century never rose above a thousand². Attempts had been made to agitate on the basis of improvements in tenants' rights in 1881 in the North-East, with the formation of the Scottish Farmers' Alliance. However, the movement was almost entirely concentrated in Aberdeenshire, was politically very Liberal, and in 1886 adopted the name of the Scottish Land Reform Alliance³.

Much can be drawn from the history of the National Farmers' Union (NFU - England and Wales), where political divisions amongst the agricultural community weakened efforts to promote lasting, effective farmer organisation⁴. In both countries, the major trigger for organisation was farmer relationships with wholesalers, in England involving the meat trade and in Scotland the milk trade⁵. For Scotland, definite moves came as early as 1900/1, with the founding of the West of Scotland Federation of Dairy Farmers and the Federation of Dairy Farmers' Associations of Scotland, their prime aims being to increase bargaining power with the milk wholesalers, and to guarantee equal prices for all farmers⁶. The effectiveness of such campaigns provided the impetus for further expansion.

'Mr. Sloan's West of Scotland Federation of Dairy Farmers may not be responsible to the extent that some suppose for the enhanced value of milk to the producer, but it has certainly contributed something to that result. Its existence is a benefit to the milk producers, because so long as any trade is without organisation it has no means of defence, and to that extent its members are defenceless. Where organised members share in the consciousness of strength which union imparts, even those not actually

¹ Cox, G., Lowe, P. and Winter, M., 'The origins and early development of the National Farmers' Union' *Agricultural History Review*, 39 (1991), p.31. In Scotland the most senior of these was the Highland and Agricultural Society.

² In 1903 membership stood at 491 (SCA, Auditor's report, 31 December 1903), which had risen to 918 by 1938 (NFUS, Organisation Committee minutes, 28 July 1938).

³ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), pp.169-170.

⁴ Cox, G. et al., 'The origins and early development', pp.32-33.

⁵ *ibid*, p.35.

⁶ *Scottish Farmer*, 28 April 1900 p.335, 16 August 1902 p.649.

connected with the organisation derive advantage from that which costs them nothing. It is not to their credit that this should be, and the best men are not those who refuse to combine for the public good.¹

By 1903, the Federation had branches throughout south-west Scotland with a membership of 700 and an office in Glasgow². Through the next ten years it appears to have expanded, concentrating on issues of milk production and sales. However, the Federation made no attempt at political lobbying, and this was left to the SCA. The Chamber, particular under its Secretary Isaac Connell, did make efforts to become the focus for any political action by agriculturists. Its meetings regularly considered the impact of proposed legislation, especially the 1911 National Insurance Act when it was instrumental in setting up the Scottish Rural Workers' Friendly Society³. But the SCA lacked a permanent central organisation for the co-ordination of policy⁴, and was always faced with the problem of considering tenants' rights in an organisation which purported to represent both landowners and tenants. This problem of adequate representation was attacked in the farming press when the Chamber experienced considerable splits in its discussion of the 1911 Finance Bill.

'It is abundantly evident that there are too many party politicians on the governing body of the Scottish Chamber. A section would seek to capture it and make it a Tory preserve; another section would like to capture it and make it the organ of militant Radicalism. What is wanted is a representative body which will consider Parliamentary proposals from a severely agricultural standpoint, and will refuse point-blank to be led by either one political clique or another.'⁵

Quite why agitation for a Farmers' Union peaked in 1913 is unclear. Undoubtedly the success of the NFU south of the border was one motivating factor, and at the founding meeting of the NFUS, representatives of the NFU spoke in support of farmer organisation⁶. General desires for effective representation amongst farmers were voiced, indicating that the SCA was not fulfilling its potential role. Geographically, support came from those

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 23 November 1901 p.929.

² *Scottish Farmer*, 15 August 1903, p.671.

³ SCA Committee minutes, 8 May 1912.

⁴ *Scottish Farmer*, 20 March 1909, p.225, 'Reform in the Scottish Chamber'.

⁵ *Scottish Farmer*, 17 July 1909, p.591.

⁶ *Scottish Farmer*, 4 October 1913, pp.938-939.

farmers who were already organised, dairy farmers in the South-West, whose primary motivating topic continued to be the price of milk¹.

Table 1: Membership of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland

Date	Branches	Members
January 1914	15	c.500+
1915	46	c.2000+
1919	137	c.14000
March 1920	138	c.14000
1924	135	c.14000
1929	136	10,240
1931	136	9320
1935	135	N/A
1936	N/A	11336
1937	137	c.14000

Source: *Scottish Farmer*, 24 January 1914, p.86; NFUS, Central Executive Committee minutes, 23 February 1916, 31 March 1920, 19 September 1935; *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence, IV* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.445), p.3; SRO, AF 43/339, *Agricultural workers unemployment insurance. Conference on extension of and Royal Commission, 1929-31*; *Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance. Evidence* (HMSO, London, 1931), p.1072; NFUS Organisation Committee minutes, 2 June 1937; *Report of the Committee on holidays with pay. Minutes of evidence* (HMSO, London, 1937), p.156.

Membership grew fairly rapidly (see Table 1), and by 1918 the President of the NFUS was able to report that the whole of Scotland was covered². Expansion peaked around 1920 with about 14,000 members, and then fell through the 1920s to reach 9,320 in 1931, rising in the 1930s so that by the outbreak of war, levels were back to those of 1920.

Such a pattern was similar to that identified for the NFU in England and Wales³, and was linked to levels of prosperity in agriculture and the development of state agricultural policy. Although the recent (post-war)

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 28 February 1914, p.208

² NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 27 June 1918.

³ Cox, G. et al., 'The origins and early development', pp.35-36.

strength of both NFUs has been directly attributed to their close relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture for Scotland¹, it is somewhat questionable that such a relationship was a direct cause of membership growth in the pre-1939 period. Historians of the NFU have argued that it concentrated on establishing a coherent organizational capability and a monopoly of representation, which then enabled it to take advantage of the corporatist ideas that began to emerge during the 1930s and were heavily promoted during the 1940s².

An examination of the activities of the NFUS endorses this view. The NFUS had a very fluctuating relationship with the B/DOAS from the First World War onwards, and its impact on general agricultural policy was limited. The first major problem for the NFUS was that it failed to secure a monopoly of representation, until it and the SCA amalgamated in 1938. As Smith has pointed out, it was vital for the NFUS to secure monopoly of representation in order to increase its access to government, and in this the NFUS was less successful than its counterpart further south³. As with the position in England, the NFUS had its own government department with which to establish a relationship, a luxury that few industries could claim. However, because of the lack of a monopoly of representation, when it came to consultation the state was obliged to accept representations from more than one body. The NFUS claimed that it was the sole representative of practising farmers, but the BOAS refused to accept this, and the result was a series of bitter rows and threats of non-cooperation, as, for example, when attempts were made to form District Agricultural Committees and District Wage Committees during the First World War⁴.

'In connection with the Board's [BOAS] 'approval' of other organisations, I am instructed to represent to the Board as a matter of principle no body should be approved unless its membership is confined to employers of agricultural labour. Any other course is obviously illogical and indefensible. Indeed my committee [NFUS Central Executive] are of opinion that the

¹ Self, P. and Storing, H.J., *The state and the farmer* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1962), chs.2-3; Wilson, G., 'Farmers' organizations in advanced societies' in H.Newby (ed.), *International perspectives in rural sociology* (John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1978), pp.38-39; Grant, W., 'The National Farmers' Union: the classic case of incorporation?' in D.Marsh (ed.), *Pressure politics: interest groups in Britain* (Junction, London, 1983), p.133.

² Grant, W., 'The National Farmers Union', p.133; Cox, G. et al, 'The origins and early development', pp.46-47.

³ Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support in Britain: the development of the agricultural policy community* (Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1990), p.76.

⁴ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 22/ May 1918, 22 February 1921. For the position in England see Cox, G. et al, 'The origins and development', pp.40-41.

Board - in refusing to recognise that fact that this Union is the only known organisation of employers so far as farm workers are concerned, despite the fact that the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries so recognised the National Farmers' Union in England - have allowed themselves to be influenced by considerations which are totally irrelevant.'¹

The failure of farmers to organise themselves into one interest group clearly did not help the development of links with the state. In 1931, an amalgamation between the SCA and the NFUS was proposed; but there was much criticism of the idea, it being argued that the NFUS was a 'farmers' organisation, and an amalgamation would weaken rather than strengthen farmer representation because the new body would be forced to represent a diverse range of differing interests.

'The crux of the position is the qualification for membership. The membership of the N.F.U. is limited to those actually farming and rightly so. The membership of the new body, the Scottish Farmers' Association, allows in landlords, factors, lawyer-factors, etc., and is, in fact, the same franchise as the Scottish Chamber. Thus it is correct to say that the Farmers' Union is to be swallowed by the Chamber. By letting landlords and factors into the Union we will weaken instead of strengthen it, because we will get men who have no practical knowledge of farming, but who, on account of their position, will exercise a dominating influence in the new body. The new body will not be a Farmers' Association. It will merely be a nondescript body representing nobody, torn by internal dissensions between the ever-warring interests of which it will be formed.'²

The proposed amalgamation failed; clearly the different interests of tenants and landowners were still perceived as being opposing ones³.

Nevertheless, the severity of the economic crisis in agriculture during the early 1930s did promote a policy of increased communication between the two groups, resulting in a number of joint conferences and deputations⁴. By 1937 the two bodies were liaising over the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Scotland Bill and the resulting requirement for employer representation on

¹ Letter to the BOAS (21 February 1921) in NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 22 February 1921.

² *Scottish Farmer*, 23 May 1931, p.730, 'National Farmers' Union and Scottish Chamber - the case against amalgamation'.

³ The debate on amalgamation can be followed in *Scottish Farmer*, 1931, pp.423, 730, 836, 928.

⁴ SCA Directors' meeting minutes, 12 February, 1930, 3 November 1932.

District Agricultural Wage Committees¹. This closer relationship culminated in a merger of the two bodies in 1938².

Both Smith and Cooper have emphasised the changing role of the state in agriculture during the 1930s; the new policy being 'interventionist' and 'corporatist', placing great importance on the state's ability to work more closely with farming organisations, in order to get them to co-operate with proposals to improve the marketing of agricultural produce and to accept only limited financial support³.

'By attempting to increase its capabilities to intervene in agriculture, the state was starting to limit its autonomy by creating dependence on the farmers and by building a policy community which ensured that the activity was within a certain framework. The 1930s saw the move away from a pluralistic issue network to a closed community as the state saw the need for an agricultural policy and the NFU [in England and Wales] had resources available for the development of the policy. In exchange for consultation and support the NFU could offer information, political support, legitimacy, the compliance of members and assistance in implementation. The NFU was also successful at aggregating the demands of various sectors and so simplified policy-making for MAF [Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries] because it only had to deal with one group rather than many conflicting groups.'⁴

Some farmers in Scotland were clearly aware of the need to emulate the NFU in England in its growing relationship with MAF. Such a change in attitude is most noted in the *Scottish Farmer*, which argued against amalgamation in 1931, but accepted that by 1938 there was a need for a single voice representing Scottish farmers⁵. The NFUS was also pulled into more frequent contact with the DOAS through the 1930s, particularly with the implementation of the Agricultural Marketing Acts, and this trend resulted in the Union shifting its offices from Glasgow, its traditional base of support, to Edinburgh in 1935⁶. Nevertheless, it was unlikely to be as successful as the NFU, whilst agricultural opinions remained potentially split between the NFUS and the SCA.

¹ SCA Directors meeting minutes, 22 September 1937, and Business Committee minutes, 13 October 1937.

² NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 19 May 1938.

³ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, ch.9; Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*, ch.3.

⁴ Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*, p.85.

⁵ *Scottish Farmer*, 28 March 1931, p.423, 19 March 1938, p.412.

⁶ *Scottish Farmer*, 16 March 1935, p.377.

Part of the reason for reduced political influence was the smaller size of the NFUS. Farming policies were generally decided on a British basis, and the NFUS was a small consideration, compared to the much larger NFU. The NFU was also much closer to the main centres of power, Parliament and Whitehall. Limited financial resources meant that it was difficult for the NFUS to send deputations and representatives to meet ministers, and it could not afford the luxury of a paid Parliamentary lobbyist¹. As with the NFU, the NFUS did attempt to gain direct political representation in the immediate post-war period, but the experiment was both short-lived and unsuccessful². From this point onwards the Union relied on lobbying sympathetic Scottish MPs and Peers, in particular James Gardiner (National Liberal, Kinross and Western Perthshire, 1918-23, an Honorary President of the NFUS) and Sir Harry Hope (Conservative, Buteshire 1910-18, West Stirlingshire 1918-22, Fofarshire 1924-31, Central Executive Committee member and President of the SCA)³. However, relations between the political establishment were not as close as the NFU achieved⁴. In the case of ministers the NFUS was at a distinct disadvantage; the Minister responsible for Scottish agriculture was the Secretary of State for Scotland, for whom farming was only one of many briefs, and who was located for the most part in London. Therefore he was both geographically distant and faced the problem of balancing many varied

¹ The NFUS did manage to get the services of an unpaid honorary representative in 1916, Robert Orr, who agreed to assist the Union part-time; however, it is unclear what contribution he made (NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 6 December 1916). In contrast, the NFU appointed a paid, experienced parliamentary lobbyist as early as 1913 (Self, P. and Storing, H.J., *The state and the farmer*, p.42), and in the 1920s emerged as the primary agricultural representative (Moore, S., 'The agrarian Conservative party in parliament, 1920-1929' *Parliamentary History*, 10 (1991), pp.351-354).

² The policy consisted of the setting up of a parliamentary fund, giving official support to general election candidates, and occasionally adopting candidates (NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 20 March 1918 and 26 November 1918). For similar political activities of the NFU see Self, P. and Storing, H.J., *The state and the farmer*, p.43; Cox, G. et al., 'The origins and early development', pp.38-39.

³ Other parliamentarians who are mentioned in NFUS minutes as agreeing to help with particular issues; MPs: Cecil Dudgeon, Galloway 1922-4 and 1929-31 Liberal; Arthur Murray, Kincardineshire 1908-23 Liberal; John Mackie, Galloway 1931-58 Conservative; Robert Smith, Aberdeen & Kincardine Central 1924-45 Conservative; Malcolm Barclay-Harvey, Kincardineshire & W. Aberdeenshire 1923-29 and 1931-39 Conservative; James Stewart, E.Fife 1933-61 Liberal; Alexander Scott, Glasgow (Bridgeton) 1910-22 Liberal; Murdoch Wood, Central Aberdeenshire 1919-24 Banffshire 1929-35 Liberal. Lords: Lord Saltoun of Abernethy, Earl of Stair (M.P. Wigtownshire 1906-14), Marquis of Aberdeen and Temair.

⁴ Self, P. and Storing, H.J., *The state and the farmer*, pp.43-45; Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*, p.82. Reginald Dorman-Smith was NFU President, 1936-7, and Minister of Agriculture, January 1939-May 1940.

interests¹. On the other hand, the influence of the NFUS was undoubtedly increasing, and this was clearly demonstrated in 1934 when the Minister of Agriculture (and future Secretary of State) addressed the NFUS Central Executive², and in 1939 when the Secretary of State, accompanied by DOAS civil servants, spent a day in Aberdeenshire and Banff with a NFUS delegation touring farms and listening to complaints by farmers³. Nevertheless, the overall conclusion of the impact of the NFUS on government policy is similar to that of Cooper and Smith, that the general direction of policy was governed by general economic and political factors, and controlled by the politicians⁴.

Internal factors also have a role to play in the effectiveness of farmer organisations⁵. Recent historical analysis considers the period 1910s-1930s as a critical one for the NFU in developing a structure that could take advantage of increasing state intervention in the 1930s and 1940s⁶. In contrast, the NFUS appears to have failed to make the move to an effective pressure group, and internal inefficiency remained a continual hindrance. The problems of 'differing interests' and 'lack of involvement by members' were noticeable⁷. As mentioned already, the NFUS lacked a monopoly of farmer representation. Its control over rather diverse producer elements was relatively shallow; for example, in June 1920 a row broke out, after two NFUS representatives refused to support a boycott of the Central Wages Committee⁸. In February 1921 the Central Executive was forced to issue a circular to control its members on local District Wage Committees⁹. Such problems had not been solved by 1938, when on the reintroduction of minimum wage committees, a Stirling County NFUS representative voting

¹ The 1937 Committee on Scottish administration complained that both distance and multiplicity of functions were impeding the Secretary of State's work (*Report of the Committee on Scottish administration*, pp.19-20).

² NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 25 January 1934.

³ SRO, AF 43/124, *Agricultural Policy. General*, 1939.

⁴ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*, conclusion; Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*, ch.3; Moore, S., 'The agrarian Conservative party'.

⁵ Bell, C. and Newby, H., 'Capitalist farmers in the British class structure' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 14 (1974), p.90.

⁶ Cox, G. et al. 'The origins and early development'; Cooper, A.F. *British agricultural policy*, pp.218-219; Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*, pp.76-79; Moore, S., 'The agrarian Conservative party'.

⁷ Wilson, G., 'Farmers' organizations', pp.40-43.

⁸ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 1 June 1920.

⁹ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 4 May 1921.

with the SFSU¹. The weakness of local organisation, particularly the low pay for branch and county secretaries, was commented on as a problem by the President in 1921, but it appears little was done to change radically the organisational structure². The basic problem was that the NFUS was attempting to represent a large number of producers, whose interests were often not the same. To be effective, such an organisation required strong leadership and an effective bureaucracy, and the NFUS lacked both.

A classic example of this occurred in 1935 when the Central Executive, after protracted negotiations with the DOAS and the SFSU, produced a wage collective bargaining scheme that was resoundingly rejected by branches, despite the implicit threat of statutory regulation. The Central Executive appears to have failed to communicate to the branches the reasoning behind its negotiations, and many branches failed to take part in the vote, though it seems that many would have privately accepted the proposed scheme³. The Union was split over whether voluntary wage regulation was a preferred option; and this was complicated by the complete opposition of branches from the North-East who were opposing any kind of contact with government departments if the state refused to extend its wheat protection scheme to oats⁴. One Ministry of Labour observer passed the following judgement:

'It was very evident that the [Central] Executive really wished to evade all responsibility in the matter and to place the whole onus upon the Department of Agriculture. Their timidity may have been due to the fact that they have no real authority over the branches for the National Union is a comparatively loose Federation of District Unions. Whatever the reason, it was manifest that the Executive had come to a decision that the only system of collective bargaining which they could push would be the one in which the Department of Agriculture took the initiative at every stage and which imposed practically no obligations on themselves.'⁵

It would be wrong to dismiss the NFUS as a body that had no impact and that was riven with persistent internal factional fighting. During the 1930s

¹ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 19 May 1938.

² NFUS AGM, 28 July 1921.

³ PRO, LAB 2/2017/5, *Agriculture - Scotland - proposal of the SFSU for a scheme for the promotion of collective agreements in the industry in Scotland, 1934-5*, Letter from the Chief Conciliation Officer (Glasgow), 31 July 1935.

⁴ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 30 July 1936.

⁵ PRO, LAB 2/2017/5, *Agriculture - Scotland - proposal of the SFSU for a scheme for the promotion of collective agreements in the industry in Scotland, 1934-5*, Letter from the Chief Conciliation Officer (Glasgow), 13 February 1935.

membership was growing, and in 1935 the *Scottish Farmer* commented that 'the voice of the Union is listened to with respect, and its views and opinions receive careful consideration, for the Government recognises that the Union is thoroughly representative of the farmers of Scotland.'¹ However, the NFUS lacked the internal strength of the NFU, and the problem of conflicting interests amongst members was one that it sometimes found difficult to contain. With the state increasingly looking for a more formal, institutional role for farmers' organisations, the NFUS was less likely to receive a privileged hearing if it could not deliver an organised and co-operative farming community.

The Scottish Farm Servants' Union

The development of agricultural trade unionism has received considerable attention in both historical and contemporary literature, though the vast majority of such work has excluded Scotland². A common focus for much of this research has been the issue of why agricultural trade unions have been so weak, particularly with reference to the lack of direct action and relatively low levels of membership. Emphasis has been placed on the geographical isolation of farm workers in small groups, and the close relationship that farm workers often appear to have had with their employers. As early as 1923, the economist J.A.Venn made the following conclusion:

'In the first place agriculture is, from its nature, a scattered occupation; to secure a hearing from some thousands of labourers, distributed over perhaps a hundred villages in every County, demands the multiplication of officials and a great outlay of time and money. The hours of labour are long, and there is no factory door at which to meet crowds of prospective members at an ascertained hour. Nor can members, once secured, be frequently collected to hear advice or to receive instructions from their local officials, and those in arrear with subscriptions cannot be constantly reminded of the penalties attaching to their position. Then, non-membership does not carry

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 16 March 1935.

² Groves, R., *Sharpen the sickle. The history of the farm workers' union* (Merlin, London, 1981, reprint of 1949 edition); Newby, H., *The deferential worker: a study of farm workers in East Anglia* (Allen Lane, London, 1977), ch.4; Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men: rural radicalism in Norfolk, 1870-1923* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985); Danziger, R., *Political powerlessness: agricultural workers in post-war England* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988); Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed: farm workers' trade unions in Wales 1889-1950* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1989); Howell, D.W., 'Labour organization among agricultural workers in Wales, 1872-1921' *Welsh History Review*, 16 (1992), pp.63-92.

with it the disadvantages that exist in similar circumstances in other occupations. Non-members are not ostracised on the farm as they are in the factory, partly because only a minority of the whole body of agricultural labour adheres to the Unions, and partly because field-work, in addition to being of an isolated character, is not exclusively confined to those of one sex or any particular age group. Again, subscriptions to their Union represent a relatively great demand on the pockets of the agricultural workers than do the corresponding payments by factory hands. In Scotland and the North of England where "living-in" is the general custom, the normal attitudes of a society, or its orders in emergency, are not likely to prevail with servants who are to all intents and purposes members of their employers' households for a definite number of months. Lastly, the total membership of the Unions has never exceeded ten per cent. of the whole body of rural workers, and no official could expect to carry out all before him on such a foundation.¹

In addition, Robertson has identified a number of further constraints to agricultural trade unionism specifically within early twentieth century rural Scotland; significant stratification within the workforce between different types of workers, the high proportion of female labour, the fixed contract terms with the emphasis on individual bargaining, the prevalence of the tied cottage, and the high level of worker mobility².

With the many potential obstacles that faced organised labour in agriculture, why did trade unionism appear as a permanent feature in the early twentieth century? For England and Wales a number of factors have been identified, the growth in industrial unrest during the decade prior to 1914, the tradition of religious non-conformism in rural areas, and the economic and social instability of the First World War³.

With reference to Scotland two hypotheses have been offered; firstly, Robertson has linked the development of the SFSU (particularly its merger with the Transport and General Workers' Union in 1932) to Marshall's concept of citizenship (civil, political and social). She argued that during the first half of the twentieth century the Scottish farm worker broke free of his 'encapsulation' in the agricultural community to take 'his place in the wider, national society, able to participate in such as a full and acknowledged member'⁴. Alternatively, Carter, in a Marxian framework, proposed that the

¹ Venn, J.A., *The foundations of agricultural economics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1923), pp.206-207.

² Robertson, B.A., 'The Scottish farm servant and his union', pp.95-97.

³ Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, chs.5-6; Mutch, A., *Rural life in south-west Lancashire 1840-1914* (Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, Occasional Paper no.16, 1988), p.57; Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed*, chs.3-4; Howell, D.W., 'Labour organization among agricultural workers'.

⁴ Robertson, B.W., 'The Scottish farm servant', pp.102-109.

SFSU was a reaction to the collapse of earlier peasant-based strategies to defend hired farm workers' interests¹. What, then, is the evidence concerning the establishment of the SFSU in 1912?

As with the unions in England and Wales, the founding of a union in Scotland was made in the light of a number of earlier attempts. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, Scottish farm workers had demonstrated a remarkable lack of collective action, the first major disturbances being against the employment of 'bondagers' in the 1860s². Further attempts at labour organisation occurred in the late nineteenth century in the North East, Perthshire, Forfar and Ross-shire, but they were limited in membership, geographical coverage, and impact³. The message from such activities was clear; there was some discontent over working conditions in the countryside, particularly the long hours of work⁴, but there was little evidence of poor relations between farmer and worker, or of direct worker action in the pursuance of any demands.

During the 1910s, the trigger appears to have been the intervention of external forces rather than a sudden development of collective unrest amongst farm workers themselves⁵. In 1912, in a climate of general industrial discontent, there was a strike by tailors in Turriff (Aberdeenshire), led by George Durward, a member of the Aberdeen branch of the Social Democratic Federation. Durward was approached by some local farm servants in April to help set up a trade union⁶. At this point the Aberdeen Trades Council stepped in to assist, in the form of Joseph Duncan (President

¹ Carter, I., 'Unions and myths: farm servants' unions in Aberdeenshire, 1870-1900' in T.M.Devine (ed.), *Farm servants and labour in lowland Scotland, 1770-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1984), p.224.

² Dunbabin, J.P.D., *Rural discontent in nineteenth-century Britain* (Faber & Faber, London, 1974), ch.6. Efforts to form trade unions in Perthshire in the 1800s and 1830s had very little impact; Houston, G., 'Labour relations in Scottish agriculture before 1870' *Agricultural History Review*, 6 (1958), pp.34-40.

³ For a guide to trade unions in Aberdeenshire see Evans, G., 'Farm servants' unions in Aberdeenshire from 1870-1900' *Scottish Historical Review*, 31 (1952), pp.29-40, and the critique by Carter, I., 'Unions and myths'. Carter examines the possible link between the mutual improvement movement and trade union agitation in the nineteenth century rural north-east in, Carter, I., 'The mutual improvement movement in north-east Scotland in the nineteenth century' *Aberdeen University Review*, 46 (1976), pp.383-392. For comments on trade unions see *Royal Commission on Labour: the agricultural labourer*, III (P.P.1893-4, XXXVI, Cd.6894), Pt.I, pp.29-30, 70, 87, 133, 136-9, 151, 161-2; Pt.II, pp.25, 31, 62-3, 115, 192, 205.

⁴ For example see *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.74.

⁵ The early history of the SFSU relies purely on information from Duncan; see NLS, Duncan Papers Acc.5601(4), no.4; *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1926, pp.3-4, June 1926, p.26, July 1926, p.46, August 1926, p.66, September 1926, p.86; Smith, J., *Joe Duncan*, chs.2-3.

⁶ Mutch similarly linked farm worker collective action in Lancashire during 1913 to the agitation in other industries; Mutch, A., *Rural life in south-west Lancashire*, p.57.

of the Council, General Secretary of the Scottish Steam Vessels Enginemens's and Firemen's Union, and a local I.L.P. organiser). The support of the Trades Council and other labour organisations, who had considerable experience in labour organisation, was very important, since previous attempts had often failed through lack of organisational ability¹. The backgrounds of the initial office bearers of the SFSU were distinctly non-agricultural, with Duncan being appointed a Vice President and James Rothney (a railway signalman and union activist), General Secretary; Duncan's union also provided offices for the SFSU in Aberdeen.

Organisational work spread to other areas, again relying on local activists from outside agriculture². By June 1914, the SFSU had 150 branches and 12,000 members (see Table 2), and a full-time Organiser. Realising the importance of communication with a scattered membership the union also started up a monthly journal (*Scottish Farm Servant*) in April 1913. Without the support of outside labour activists, the SFSU would have almost certainly been a short-lived experiment.

Can this be described as a result of growing 'class consciousness'? Robertson rejected such an idea, focusing on the position of the individual; but given the dramatic early success of the SFSU one must question such a view. In 1893 the Royal Commission on Labour concluded that in many areas relationships between farmers and workers were less close than previous decades, as one investigator put it:

'To discontent among agricultural labourers there appears to be no relief tap. Farm servants do not indulge in strikes. They grin and bear it or they leave country life altogether. The "grin and bear it" policy brings no satisfaction to the servant, and as it is invariably accompanied by half-hearted and pathetic labour, it either creates or intensifies distrust in the employer.'³

The critical moment came when this increasing awareness of an inadequate social and economic position found a political outlet, one essentially furnished by the trade union movement in Scotland. However, such conditions were far from static, and the SFSU's fortunes fluctuated with

¹ This had been a particular factor in the dramatic rise and fall of English agricultural trade unionism during the 1870s; Dunbabin, J.P.D., 'The incidence and organization of agricultural trades unionism in the 1870s' *Agricultural History Review*, 16 (1968), pp.130-136.

² One prominent example was Andrew Dodds, a tailor with radical political leanings from Pathhead, Midlothian.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.27. Increasing separation socially between workers and farmers was also feature noted by Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, p.159.

them throughout the period; a fact clearly demonstrated in the sharp swings in membership and branch coverage (see Table 2).

Table 2: Membership of the Scottish Farm Servants' Union

Date	Branches	Male	Female	Total
June 1912	9			1000
December 1912	80			5000
June 1914	150			12000
December 1915				4830
December 1916	74			2552
January 1918	187			10976
December 1918	280			22251
June 1919	316	24800	2760	27560
December 1919	424	31946	3414	35360
May 1920		34762	3740	38502
December 1921				19072
1923	222	10151	1092	11293
1924	224			10286
1925	243			10817
1926	184			9115
1927				6133
1928	110			4771
1929				3889
1930				3724
1931				3228
October 1932				1863*
June 1936	187			6965
1937	257			

* those members with less than 3 months membership arrears

Sources: NLS Duncan Papers Acc 5601(4), no.4, p.22; SFSU Executive Committee minutes; *Reports of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies* (annually published as a Parliamentary Paper until 1917, then separately as an Official Publication); *Reconstruction Committee. Report of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee; evidence* (P.P.1918, V, Cd. 9080), p.39; SRO, AF 43/339 *Agricultural workers unemployment insurance. Conference on extension of and Royal Commission, 1929-31 ; Return showing details of membership, income, expenditure, and funds of registered trade unions with 10,000 or more members in the years 1924 and 1925* (P.P.1926, XXII, Cd.2720), p.4, *in the years 1925 and 1926* (P.P.1928, IX, Cd.3056), p.4; SRO, AF 43/187, *Agricultural Wages Regulation (Scotland) Bill, 1937 ; Report of the Committee on holidays with pay. Minutes of evidence* (HMSO, London, 1937), p.444.

For other agricultural trade unions, the First World War was associated with significant membership growth¹; but it was only 1917-18 that really saw a dramatic advance in SFSU fortunes². The initial impact of the war was to disrupt union organisation. The result was a decline in membership; many local officials joined the forces and the branches came under severe pressure, falling to 74 in number by late 1916³. Yet by December 1918, there were 280 branches with 22,000 members, most of the growth occurring in 1918. A number of possible factors may be behind this. Firstly, workers had seen a significant fall in real earnings while farmer profits had risen⁴; secondly, the trade union and labour movement generally in Scotland was extremely active⁵; and thirdly, the introduction of the Corn Production Act with its provisions for District Agricultural Wage Committees gave the SFSU a perfect opportunity to initiate further campaigns for organised worker representation. Finally, the increased use of schemes to protect essential workers meant that farm workers were less likely to be recruited⁶.

Riding on a high of general political expectation and collectivism during 1918-19, the SFSU successfully expanded into a national organisation, with membership growth in areas that had previously proved unreceptive to trade unionism (notably Dumfries and Galloway). The Union moved its headquarters to a more national location (Stirling), and appointed five male organisers and a women's organiser, the latter in recognition of the high proportion of female workers in the labour force. Throughout these years women made up about 10% of union membership and over 20% of the regular labour force⁷. In December 1919, the SFSU had over 35,000

¹ Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, pp.117-126; Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed*, chs.3-4; Howell, D.W., 'Labour organization among agricultural workers', pp.74-78 and 91.

² For estimated English union membership see Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, p.228.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1916, p.4. The decline can also be noted in the pattern of sales of the *Scottish Farm Servant*; August 1914 6,000, falls to 3,500 by 1916, January 1918 10,000+ (*Scottish Farm Servant*, January 1918, p.122). The English unions faced similar problems, Armstrong, A., *Farmworkers: a social and economic history, 1770-1980* (Batsford, London, 1988), p.168.

⁴ See chapters 2 and 3.

⁵ Hutchison, I.G.C., *A political history of Scotland, 1832-1924: parties, elections and issues* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1986), ch.9.

⁶ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture in the First World War* (Routledge, London, 1989), pp.106-107.

⁷ *Scottish Farm Servant*, February 1919, p.256, February 1918, p.143; SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 10 May 1919, 18 October 1919.

members in 424 branches, the main problem now being that of organisation and communication with such a sizeable, scattered membership¹.

However, the tide began to turn when in December 1920 declining sales of the *Scottish Farm Servant* were reported². The post-war ideal of collectivism was fading along with the economic boom, and, as with other trade unions, the SFSU suffered a sharp decline in membership and its financial position³. In the period 1920-3, membership fell by 70%, and the financial position continually worsened, so that the Union was forced for the first time to use overdraft facilities, and the organisers were reduced to one⁴. By 1923 the position stabilised, and the membership remained at around 10-11,000 for the next two years⁵. The reasons were again partly economic and partly political. The short-term pressure on the labour market eased, and the SFSU had organised a number of successful campaigns against farmers' attempts to cut wages and increase hours, firstly in Ross-shire in 1922⁶, and most dramatically in East Lothian where 1,400 workers came out on strike in May 1923⁷. The focus was now one of concentration on areas of strength, primarily the Lothians, Fife and around Glasgow, and a retreat from regions where even in 1919 trade unionism had been weak⁸. Therefore, the experiment with 'class organisation' in Scottish agriculture since 1912 was only a partial success; even in the North-East, the birthplace of the Union, collective organisation was weak by the late 1920s⁹. The SFSU proceeded to lurch from one crisis to the next. In 1927 it was forced to sell its office at Stirling and move into rented accommodation in Airdrie, and in August 1929 it was reported that a number of District Councils (the main links between local branches and the national headquarters) had gone out of existence¹⁰.

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, November 1919, p.108.

² SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 26 December 1920.

³ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 30 April 1921, 11 December 1921.

⁴ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 7 October 1922, 12 March 1922, 16 June 1922.

⁵ SFSU branch circular, April 1925.

⁶ *Scottish Farm Servant*, July 1922.

⁷ *Scottish Farm Servant*, May, June and July 1923; SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 10 June 1923.

⁸ For example in November 1924 it was decided to close all branches in Wigtownshire and Dumfriesshire; SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 9 November 1924.

⁹ For a literary confirmation of the decline of unionism in the North-East see Gibbon, L.G., *Cloud Howe* (originally published 1933, republished by Canongate, Edinburgh, 1988), p.74, where a fight between spinners and ploughmen results from an exchange of insults including this from the spinners:

'Jock Cronin said the ploughmen should be black ashamed, they that once had a union like any other folk, but had been too soft in the guts to stick by it, they'd been feared by the farmers into leaving the union, the damned half-witted joskins they were.'

¹⁰ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 4 September 1927, 18 August 1929.

Given its weak financial position, the SFSU stood little chance of surviving the Depression of the early 1930s. In October 1931 it was forced to cease publication of the *Scottish Farm Servant*, which had been losing money for a number of years, and by 1932 crisis point had been reached. The crux of the problem was that in times of severe economic recession, the Union could not afford to organise itself, given the scattered potential membership and the low relative wages of farm workers which led to low contributions¹. The solution was amalgamation with a union that could afford the luxury of an unstable agricultural section, and Duncan (Secretary of the SFSU since 1914), turned to the Transport and General Workers' Union. Robertson has argued that this move can be seen as part of the process of integration from 'agricultural to national status'², but this is too Whiggish. Duncan as a frequenter of Scottish Trades Union Congresses and Labour Party conferences undoubtedly knew many TGWU officials, and the deal meant that the SFSU could carry on as before on the back of the T&G's general commitment to the encouragement of trade unionism. The commitment to a separate identity for Scottish farm workers meant that a merger with the English National Union of Agricultural Workers was never considered.

The new arrangement, changing the union name to the Scottish Farm Servants' Section of the Transport and General Workers' Union, resulted in the ability of the Union to run continual budget deficits until 1936. As late as December 1934 income was reported to be falling, with disappointing results from organisational efforts³. However, by 1935, expansion was under way in areas that the Union had previously abandoned or in which they had experienced serious difficulties (Dumfries & Galloway, the North East, Ayrshire)⁴. Although membership figures for the 1930s are sparse, all indications are that from 1936 membership rose. For example, income from contributions doubled in the years 1937-8⁵, and in 1937 the TGWU felt confident enough to provide considerable finance for paid organisers for a five year period⁶. The result was a membership of well above 10,000 by 1939. The improvement was undoubtedly linked with the stabilisation of the labour market after the Depression. Nevertheless, as with the NFUS, the

¹ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 8 October 1932.

² Robertson, B.W., 'The Scottish farm servant', p.109.

³ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 8 December 1934.

⁴ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 21 September 1935, 7 December 1935.

⁵ SFSU branch circular, 28 April 1939.

⁶ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 20 February 1937.

SFSU saw its organisational role being boosted by government action, where it could claim success in the introduction of unemployment insurance in 1936 and of minimum wages in 1937. The latter, with its provision for District Agricultural Wage Committees, gave a particular impetus, since the SFSU was the natural choice for organising worker representation.

The political influence of the SFSU was not so much a function of the size of its membership, but of the willingness of the political establishment to take up ideas suggested by the Union. Early on, similar to the NFUS, the SFSU faced a recognition problem. The demands of the 1917 Corn Production Act, with its District Wage Committees in Scotland to comprise of worker and employer representatives, meant that the state needed the organisation of farm workers in order to make the legislation work. To the SFSU's considerable irritation a number of other institutions (mostly friendly societies) were contacted. However, the Union rapidly moved to protect its position and was confirmed as the representative body for farm workers throughout most of Scotland¹.

From this period onwards, the SFSU became the standard representative body of organised farm labour in Scotland. When intervention in the labour market was under consideration, the SFSU was a body that was automatically consulted; for example; by the 1926 Inter-Departmental Committee on Agricultural Unemployment Insurance, the 1931 Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance, the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee in 1934, and the 1936 Committee on Farm Workers in Scotland. The SFSU provided all the worker representation for the District Agricultural Wage Committees set up under the 1937 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act. Housing was the other main issue on which the SFSU was consulted. In 1919 the SFSU was invited to attend a housing conference organised by the Scottish Board of Health, and it gave evidence to the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee in 1936. Duncan, as an individual, provided a continual source of representation for the Union; he sat on the Royal Commissions on Housing (1912-17) and Agriculture (1919), the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee (1930s), and the Agricultural Research Council (1930-38)².

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, November 1917 p.100, December 1917, p.112.

² These are not all the committees that Duncan was a member of. His life is outlined in detail in Smith, J.H., *Joe Duncan*.

Political influence also stemmed from the SFSU's links with MPs and other trade unionists. Here the SFSU had a distinct advantage over the NFUS because of its direct alignment with the Labour movement (in 1913 the Union affiliated to both the Labour Party and the Scottish T.U.C.)¹. In 1915 Ramsay MacDonald addressed an important SFSU meeting in Glasgow, and Adamson gave a speech to the A.G.M.. 1917 saw MacDonald intervene on behalf of the Union in Parliament, putting down a successful amendment to the Corn Production Bill². However, the two Labour governments (1924, 1929-31) appear to have achieved little for the SFSU. In fact, in 1924 the SFSU successfully lobbied for Scotland's exclusion from the 1924 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act. In 1929-31 the SFSU's main concern was housing, and although it managed to get a formal meeting with the Secretary of State (Adamson) in 1931, rural Scottish housing was unlikely to be a priority in a time of severe economic crisis. Housing (see below) proved a particular stumbling block. The failure of such a campaign demonstrates the limitation of the SFSU's political power; as with the NFUS, the state only preferred to listen only when it was considered politically and economically acceptable. However, given the parameters of limited membership and finance (excepting 1918-21), the SFSU had an influence that can be considered well beyond its actual size; a success resulting from two factors, the close links it retained with the trade union movement and the Labour Party, and the organisational abilities of Joe Duncan, who, in effect ran the Union from its earliest days to 1945, providing strong continuous leadership which many other trade unions and the NFUS lacked.

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, May and June 1914.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1917, pp.44-45, September 1917, p.78.

Collective Bargaining

Much of the twentieth century history of the labour market in Britain has been concerned with formalised collective bargaining¹. In Scottish agriculture there were considerable developments in collective bargaining through the first forty years of the century, a radical change occurring from the dominance of individual employer/worker bargaining prior to the First World War to the establishment of statutory minimum wages, hours of work and holidays by the late 1930s. However, the transition to this state of affairs was not one of steady progression, and was ultimately a function of the general economic problems facing agricultural labour in the 1930s.

With the formation of the SFSU came an institution that was prepared to push strongly for the development of collective bargaining; but its emphasis was on voluntary negotiations and it was firmly against any kind of legislative intervention, except that which would facilitate voluntary negotiations. The message was clear - there should be no direct state intervention². The SFSU saw collective bargaining as a way of enhancing its role in the labour market. Its first attempt at negotiations came with the SCA in 1913, when the possibility of a scheme for increased leisure time for farm workers was discussed, however the SCA went no further when its affiliated societies indicated that they wished to be left to deal with the matter themselves³. The SFSU also approached farmers' societies in Moray and Perth to discuss the implementation of a 'half-holiday'⁴. Prior to the First World War, the SFSU concentrated on the 'half-holiday' rather than wages (the 'half-holiday' was a half-day on Saturday to which many urban workers

¹ For examples see; Wilkinson, F., 'Collective bargaining in the steel industry in the 1920s' in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.), *Essays in labour history, 1918-1939* (Croom Helm, London, 1977), pp.102-132; Jowitt, J.A. and McIvor, A.J. (eds.), *Employers and labour in the English textile industries, 1850-1939* (Routledge, London, 1988); Holford, J., *Reshaping labour: organisation, work and politics - Edinburgh in the Great War and after* (Croom Helm, London, 1988); McKinlay, A. and Zeitlin, J., 'The meanings of managerial prerogative: industrial relations and the organisation of work in British engineering, 1880-1939' *Business History*, 31 (1989), pp.32-47; Treble, J.G., 'Interpreting the record of wage negotiations under arbitral regime: a game theoretic approach to the coal industry conciliation boards, 1893-1914' *Business History*, 31 (1989), pp.61-80; *idem*, 'The pit and the pendulum: arbitration in the British coal industry, 1893-1914' *Economic Journal*, 100 (1990), pp.1095-1108.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, July 1913 p.2, September 1913, p.14.

³ SCA Directors minutes, 4 December 1913, Business Committee minutes, 18 December 1913, 28 January 1914.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, July 1913 p.8, November 1926, p.128, August 1913, p.2, November 1913 p.6.

were already entitled). The Union clearly felt it would have more impact on this front than in interfering with wage bargaining where a strong tradition of individual negotiation had been established¹. In fact the prime aim of the 'Half-Holiday' Campaign was to promote discussion of the issue and to persuade farmers to agree voluntarily to it rather than face parliamentary interference. In order to boost the campaign, parliamentary bills were introduced by Labour M.P.s in 1913 and 1914, which, though unlikely to be passed into law, put pressure on dissenting farmers².

The early part of the war marked a distinct change in SFSU policy. Initially the Union felt that the tightened labour market could be used to help their campaign for the half-holiday³. Exactly how effective this campaign was is unclear, though some farmers were giving the half-holiday to their workers. However, the fall in real wages, plus the increasing profits of farmers, caused the Union to switch its campaign increasingly to wages and the idea of a 'War Bonus'⁴. By now the farmers also had a national organisation that could negotiate systematically on their behalf, the NFUS. The SFSU approached numerous local NFUS branches for direct negotiations on wages and hours, and April 1915 saw the first local negotiating conference in Dumbarton, and in June the first agreement was obtained in Ayrshire⁵.

The agreement set the pattern for others, a commitment to raise wages by a certain amount and cut hours on a Saturday afternoon; actual wage levels were not to be set. Both sides correctly realised that setting definite wage levels, with the wide diversity of farms and workers and the tradition of independent negotiating, would be unworkable. However, the NFUS's lack of central control did create some problems, most notably when a dispute arose in the summer of 1916 over the right of County Branches to negotiate with the SFSU without notifying the Central Executive⁶. In September 1916 the NFUS accepted an SFSU invitation for national representatives to discuss policies on worker recruitment, particularly the introduction of

¹ Carter, I., 'Class and culture among farm servants in the North-East, 1840-1914' in A.A.MacLaren (ed.), *Social class in Scotland: past and present* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1976), pp.105-127.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1914, p.4. For the contents of the Bills see; P.P.1913, II, Bill 228; P.P.1914, II, Bill 178.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, October 1914, p.2.

⁴ Dewey, P.E., 'British farming profits'; *Scottish farm servant*, February 1915, p.9, June 1915, p.12.

⁵ *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1915, p.7, July 1915, p.5.

⁶ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 3 May 1916.

employment registers at hiring fairs¹. The success of these negotiations was dramatic, with agreement on a system of permanent local committees in December², the BOAS backing the scheme as a way of reducing unnecessary labour turnover³. However, the scheme was put on hold when it became clear that government intervention in the labour market could be expected in the near future⁴.

From 1917 development took place on two tracks; firstly, the state intervened in the labour market under the 1917 Corn Production Act (CPA); and secondly, the two unions continued to negotiate, at local, and eventually, at national level, on a voluntary basis over wage movements and the length of the working week. The basis for the introduction of the CPA, and its impact on labour conditions, has been well documented elsewhere. However, its application to Scotland has received no attention at all⁵.

Part II of the CPA laid down a minimum wage of at least 25s a week, and the establishment of local and national wage committees. In England and Wales, committees were to be formed for most counties, with a central Agricultural Wages Board supervising the operation of the Act and having the right to overrule county committee decisions. For Scotland, a number of amendments ensured a somewhat different system; committees were to be established in 12 districts (District Wage Committees - DWCs). A central committee (the Scottish Central Agricultural Wages Committee - SAWC) was to oversee the provisions of the Act, but it had few powers to intervene in the DWCs. Such amendments had been introduced with the support of farmers and workers in an effort to tone down the impact of the CPA. Quite simply, there was no desire for minimum wages in Scotland, and if they were to be imposed, then both the NFUS and the SFSU wanted them to be close to the current local collective bargaining system that had already been

¹ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 20 September 1916.

² NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 27 December 1916. The scheme was framed by the Divisional Officer of the Board of Trade's Labour Department in Scotland.

³ SRO, AF 43/96, *Agriculture and recruiting. Substitution of labour, 1916-18*.

⁴ NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes, 26 January 1917.

⁵ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history of England and Wales, VIII, 1914-39* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978), pp.94-97, 118-122 and 139-141; Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, pp.121-129; Armstrong, A., *Farmworkers*, ch.7; Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed*, chs.4-5; Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*, pp.93-95; Howell, D.W., 'Labour organization', pp.74-76, 87-91. In fact Whetham incorrectly believed that Part II of the Act (the clauses on minimum wages) did not apply to Scotland - Whetham, E.H., 'The Agriculture Act, 1920, and its repeal - the "great betrayal"' *Agricultural History Review*, 22 (1974), p.39.

established. In 1916, when giving evidence to the Selborne Committee, the SFSU had made its objections quite clear:

'Mr. Duncan said that the Union's fundamental objection to the setting up of wages boards was that the conditions of the farm workers in Scotland were not before the War nor at the present time such as to demand special assistance from the state. The only ground for intervention would be if farm servants were in a specially disadvantageous position. The Union felt that farm servants would obtain better wages by trade union methods than by means of state assistance, and he could not conceive of legislation bringing any improvement in the position of Scottish farm servants without their own organisation.'¹

The setting up of the DWCs in Scotland took a considerable amount of time since the BOAS was unsure of what method to use, particularly in areas where the NFUS and the SFSU were weak. The problem was essentially of ensuring that worker representatives were not imposed on local areas, and the BOAS resorted to time-consuming local elections which proved difficult to organise². The government-appointed chairman of the SAWC, Sir James Wilson, was keen not to interfere initially in the workings of the DWCs, interpreting the CPA in Scotland as meaning minimal intervention. Wilson was a rather unusual choice for chairman; a Scot who had spent much of his life in the Indian Civil Service working on land settlement, and had retired in 1910 to be appointed a Superintending Inspector by the Board of Agriculture (England and Wales)³. The policy emphasised by the SAWC was that the DWCs should be setting minimum rates for the least efficient worker, and the result was that the rates set by the DWCs bore little relation to actual market rates, except in the low-wage counties of Dumfries, Kirkcudbright and Wigtown.

'The minimum rates of wages have in Scotland generally been fixed with the object of securing to the ordinary worker in agriculture a sufficient wage to enable him to maintain himself and his family at a reasonable standard of living; but it has been borne in mind that they will be applicable in practice not only to the ordinary worker, but also to the least efficient, so that the effect of fixing them too high would probably be to reduce the number of workers employed on farms and make it impossible for the less efficient workers to

¹ *Reconstruction Committee. Report of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee, evidence* (P.P. 1918, V, Cd. 9080), p. 41.

² SRO, AF 43/112, *Corn Production Act. Formation of Central and District Wage Committees, 1918-9*. All the DWCs were not formed until June 1918, and by August 1918 only two had actually set rates.

³ *Scottish Farmer*, 13 October 1917, p.752.

obtain employment in agriculture at all. No attempt has been made by most Committees [DWCs] to fix the minimum rates as the standard rates to be actually paid to the ordinary worker....Thus, generally speaking, in Scotland the present actual wages are considerably higher than the minimum rates, and one consequence of this is that there have been so far few complaints under the Act, and no prosecutions.¹

The first prosecution came in November 1919, when a Thornhill farmer was fined for paying his ploughman at below minimum rates². Other prosecutions occurred, but they were few in number and mostly concentrated in Dumfries and Galloway. The main problem facing the SAWC and the DWCs was their increasing lack of credibility in the light of the low minimum rates set. In October 1919, the *Scottish Farm Servant* commented that, 'the Act, in respect of the minimum wage clauses, has been a farce, a big farce, and nothing but a farce. When one finds the standard rate in a county 15s. above the legal minimum rate, it is time to stop talking and start laughing.'³

There were also disputes over the administration of the committees. In February 1919 Wilson and the SFSU clashed over keeping the meetings of the SAWC closed, and in April, the five employers representatives threatened to resign because they were dissatisfied with the committee's workings⁴. During 1920-1 the position of Wilson as chairman of the SAWC was seriously questioned by both sides. The farmers were angry at what they saw as 'interference' by the supposedly independent chairman in the workings of the DWCs. The NFUS was particularly annoyed by a number of speeches and articles by Wilson on the subject of minimum rates, and at one point they threatened to pull out completely of the whole minimum wage administration unless Wilson was removed. One NFUS SAWC member described Wilson as an 'absolute dictator, as to [the] wages, hours of labour, and general conditions of Agriculture' who used 'Autocratic methods...learned no doubt in dealing with a servile race...(and) deeply resented by those whose ideas of freedom are rather wider than those of an

¹ SRO, AF 43/133, *Royal Commission on Agricultural Policy, 1919-26*. Statement of evidence by Sir James Wilson, 13 August 1919, pp.14-15.

² *Scottish Farmer*, 29 November 1919, p.1185.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, , October 1919, p. 78. In evidence to the Royal Commission on Agriculture, Mr. James Gardner (NFUS President) also stated that the minimum rates bore no relation to actual rates; *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence, IV* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.445), p.31.

⁴ SRO, AF 43/112, *Corn Production Act. Formation of Central and District Wages Committees, 1918-9*.

Indian judge.¹ The BOAS also expressed concern at the actions being taken by Wilson, in particular his relationship with the DWCS². Similarly the SFSU called for Wilson's resignation, and only withdrew the demand when Wilson agreed not to interfere with the DWCS³. Not surprisingly, Wilson was replaced by Sheriff Morton (Chairman of the Dumfries and Galloway DWC) in March 1921 on the expiry of his term of office, though this appointment lapsed in September 1921 with the repeal of the CPA⁴.

The main problem facing the DWCS was that decisions were effectively left to the 'independent' chairmen, since invariably the employers and workers representatives remained deadlocked⁵. In addition, the number of independent members on Scottish committees was significantly reduced, as compared to England and Wales. The SAWC had a chairman and two women members appointed by BOAS, whilst the Agricultural Wages Board had a chairman and six independent members appointed by MAF. Similarly, the local committees in England and Wales had three independent members, whilst in Scotland they had only one independent chairman. This placed the independent chairmen in Scotland in a much more isolated position, with an increased possibility of accusations of bias from either side. The reasoning behind such a difference of legislative provision is unclear, the machinery in Scotland being described as 'more in keeping with Scottish traditions and psychology and more likely to work with success in the conditions then existing'⁶. In the majority of cases, the chairmen were left to decide which proposal should be carried. The situation got so bad that in February 1920, the BOAS proposed a change in regulations, allowing the SAWC to intervene in the event of a deadlock, but this was rejected⁷. Only

¹ Letter to the Secretary of the NFUS 13 May 1920 attached to NFUS Central Executive Committee minutes 1 June 1920. The NFUS actions and opinions can be followed in the minutes of the NFUS Central Executive Committee and Minimum Wage Sub-Committee minutes, 3 March 1920 to 3 December 1920.

² SRO, AF 43/139, *Corn Production Act Pt.II. Variation or cancellation of the rates of wages fixed by the Central Wages Committee, 1919-21*. Letter from the BOAS to the Under Secretary of State, 24 December 1920.

³ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 18 October 1919, 17 January 1920, 8 May 1920. The SFSU also asked that Wilson should not be re-appointed on expiry of his term of office in 1921, SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 12 February 1921.

⁴ There are no records left for the meetings of the SAWC or the DWCS, SRO files indicate that they were returned to the BOAS and then probably destroyed; SRO, AF 43/183, *Dissolution of Agricultural Wage Committees, 1921*.

⁵ *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence, I* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.345), Sir James Wilson, p.111.

⁶ SRO, AF 43/452, *Wages of farm servants. Legislation, 1936-7*, 11. Note on previous systems of wage setting in Britain.

⁷ NFUS Minimum Wage Sub-Committee, 3 March 1920.

one farmer (J.Gardner, NFUS President - Clyde & Forth DWC) and no farm servants were elected as chairman; the rest were sheriffs, lawyers and landowners, who, given their potential voting power, opened them up to accusations of making decisions on matters which they lacked any detailed knowledge¹.

The background behind the repeal of the Corn Production Act in 1921 has received a considerable amount of attention elsewhere². In England and Wales where the CPA had been seen as a considerable boost to farm workers, the repeal was met with bitter resentment (Howkins' relevant chapter is entitled 'The great betrayal')³. In Scotland the SFSU happily accepted the situation adding that 'the wages committees in Scotland had never been of any service to the workmen in Scotland.'⁴ The farmers, not surprisingly, were glad to see the back of minimum wages. The fiasco of the CPA was confirmed in the Repeal Act itself, which specifically excluded Scotland from Section 4, which specified that joint conciliation committees should be formed to replace the local Wage Committees. The exception was clause 1 which gave the BOAS the power 'to take such steps as [it] thinks best calculated to secure the voluntary formation and continuance of [local joint conciliation] committees'⁵. Approaches to the SFSU and the NFUS drew little support. As Duncan put it, 'the best thing the Board of Agriculture can do in relation to Section 4 of the Act is to do nothing.'⁶

The failure of state intervention in the Scottish agricultural labour market was further demonstrated by the attempts to extend the 1919 Hours of Employment Bill to the industry. The Bill had been born out of a desire to introduce national collective bargaining after the First World War, and with the formation of the National Industrial Conference⁷. It specified the introduction of a 48 hour week throughout most industries (thus becoming known as the '48 Hours Bill' or the 'Eight Hours Bill'). The concern here is less with the history of the Bill itself, which became caught up in the general politics of labour, than with attempts to extend it to agriculture. The

¹ *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence, I* , Sir James Wilson, pp.114-5.

² Whetham, E.H., 'The Agriculture Act, 1920'; Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy* , ch.3.

³ Groves, R., *Sharpen the sickle* , pp. 163-70; Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed*, p. 149; Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men* , ch. 7; Howell, D.W., 'Labour organization', p.91.

⁴ SFSU, AGM, 17 June 1921.

⁵ Statutes, 11 & 12 Geo. 5, Ch.48, *Corn Production Acts (Repeal) Act, 1921* .

⁶ SRO, AF 43/184, *Scheme for promoting collective bargaining, 1921-34* , Letter from the SFSU to the BOAS, 3 October 1921.

⁷ Lowe, R., 'The failure of consensus in Britain: the national industrial conference, 1919-21' *Historical Journal* , 21 (1978), pp.649-675.

negotiations surrounding the inclusion of agriculture in the Bill are complicated, and this was in no part due to the fact that the government kept changing its mind and the various departments involved (BOAS, MAF, Ministry of Labour) were often unable to agree on the matter¹. Initially the government favoured the inclusion of agriculture in the Bill, but this provision was withdrawn in the autumn of 1919 only to be re-introduced in spring 1920. BOAS officials and Sir James Wilson supported the inclusion of agriculture, a belief based on the partial success of voluntary collective bargaining on hours by the SFSU and NFUS (see below).

The employers representatives were consistently opposed to any state interference in hours, and the NFUS, SCA and the Highland and Agricultural Society united to lobby the BOAS, the Ministry of Labour, the Secretary for Scotland, the Prime Minister and various M.Ps. The NFUS was particularly unhappy with the role played by the Provisional Joint Committee (of the employers side) of the National Industrial Conference, who, it appears, went some way to accepting the inclusion of agriculture without representation from the NFUS. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour was concerned about the possibilities of administering the Act in farming, but a draft Cabinet Memo points to it accepting inclusion on principle. The Ministry of Agriculture opposed inclusion; and at one point the BOAS was arguing that Scotland should be included even if England and Wales were not.

The general confusion was made worse by the attitude of the SFSU, which took a rather pragmatic viewpoint on the Bill and argued for amendments to make the Bill workable, such as, the exclusion of shepherds, more flexibility on hours over the whole year, and the importance of negotiation as a method of achieving agreement between employers and workers. Therefore the Union was really interested in the Bill as a way of formalising the aborted agreement that it had secured at the 'Perth Conference' earlier in 1919 (see below). The extreme political nature of the Bill ultimately led to its downfall, but the continual wrangling between the various institutions involved demonstrates how impracticable state intervention in the Scottish agricultural labour market was likely to be.

¹ This section on the Hours of Employment bills is based on information in the following files: PRO, LAB 2/740/12, *Hours of Employment Bill, 1919. Requests of exclusion, 1919-20*; LAB 2/740/13, *Hours of Employment Bill, 1919. Resolutions against, 1919*; LAB 2/740/15, *Hours of Employment Bill, 1919. Memo by Scottish Farm Servants' Union, 1919-20*; SRO, AF 43/138, *Hours of Employment Bill (1919), 1919-20*.

The second track of collective bargaining during the 1917-21 period consisted of joint voluntary negotiations between the SFSU and the NFUS. The SFSU saw its role as the instigator of a system of voluntary collective bargaining throughout Scotland, and this it pursued with vigour from 1917 onwards. The success of such a policy was almost directly correlated with the membership of the SFSU and the NFUS. By 1919 agreements had been made throughout most of central Scotland; though in certain other areas (e.g. North East and Dumfries & Galloway), the farmers remained strongly opposed to collective negotiation and the membership of the SFSU was too weak to make any campaign effective¹. It must be emphasised that these agreements, on both wages and hours of work, were only voluntary, and individual bargaining between farmer and worker remained the main process of deciding exact rates, though the agreements provided a guide to both sides as to the general balance between demand and supply.

The SFSU did not seek a national wage agreement, conditions were too diverse for this and it would have gone against the tradition of individual bargaining which appeared to satisfy both employer and worker requirements. Instead the Union looked for significant gains to be made in the reduction of the working week, both in terms of a shorter working day (nine hours) and a Saturday half-holiday, which were negotiated at local conferences. The Union wanted to seal this with a national agreement, the result being the 1919 'Perth Conference' where both a half-holiday and a fifty hour week were agreed to by the NFUS². The agreement actually failed to be implemented due to a dispute over occupational coverage, and the fact that many local NFUS branches felt that it was unworkable. However, it did become the basis of many local agreements³. To the SFSU and independent observers, the Perth conference was proof that responsible voluntary collective bargaining was possible in Scottish agriculture.

Notwithstanding the breakdown of this Perth agreement, which was meant to extend to the whole of Scotland, many local conferences between county branches of the two Unions have been held, and in a number of cases agreements have been arrived at, more or less in accordance with the

¹ A guide to the local agreements obtained throughout Scotland for 1919-20 is given in *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), pp.34-46.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, March 1919, p.263; a full report on the Perth Conference is given in SRO, AF 43/138, *Hours of Employment Bill (1919) 1919-20*.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1919 p.11; *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson*, pp.32-33.

recommendations made by the Perth Conference. These local agreements are not legally binding on anyone, being merely recommendations jointly made by representatives of the Farmers' Union and the Farm Servants' Union for the guidance of the members they represent; but their moral effect has been great, and a large and growing proportion of the farmers and farm-servants of the areas concerned, whether members of the Unions or not, have in making their individual bargains followed those joint recommendations. There is no doubt that these conferences as a whole have had a very beneficial effect in reducing the number of individual disputes and preventing many changes of employment.'¹

1921 marked a dramatic break in the fortunes of agricultural labour. The ensuing depression in agricultural production was not conducive to collective bargaining; and although local NFUS and SFSU committees continued to meet through the period 1921-3, agreements were rarely forthcoming. The employers, in the face of falling revenues, were keen to cut variable costs. The main attack was on hours with farmers attempting, in areas where the SFSU had been successful in enforcing the Perth agreement, to increase the working day and reduce the incidence of the Saturday half-holiday². The weakness of the SFSU policy on voluntary collective bargaining was now demonstrated, when fear of potential unemployment led many workers to accept a cut in wages and an increase in working hours; in such circumstances it was difficult for the Union to fight back.

However, by 1922/3, when a further range of wage cuts and hours' increases was demanded by the farmers, the SFSU successfully resisted such moves, most notably in Ross-shire in May 1922³, and more spectacularly in May 1923 when 1400 East Lothian farm workers came out on strike against NFUS demands for an increased working week⁴. The strike was the only major dispute in the SFSU's history, and it proves the ability

¹ *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson*, p.33. The issue of the length of the working week and its link with employment levels has received considerable recent attention; however given the lack of precise information on employment levels and wages for the immediate post-war period, it is difficult to ascertain whether the position taken by Broadberry for the whole of the economy (that cuts in working hours shifted the labour supply curve and reduced employment levels) can be applied to this specific labour market; Broadberry, S.N., 'The emergence of mass unemployment: explaining macroeconomic trends in Britain during the trans-World War 1 period' *Economic History Review*, 44 (1990), pp.271-282.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1921, p.244; June 1921, p.300, June 1922, p.540.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, July 1922, p.544.

⁴ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 16 June 1923. The details of the strike are given in *Scottish Farm Servant*, May-July 1923.

and the willingness of farm workers to engage in collective action at the time¹.

By the mid 1920s, when the economic background had stabilised, the pattern of voluntary collective bargaining reasserted itself, though now primarily concentrated on the SFSU strongholds of central Scotland, particularly the Lothians, Fife and around Glasgow. The SFSU continued to have a strong belief in the validity of collective bargaining, believing that it would eventually replace the need for the hiring fairs². However, by 1927, when the next major attack on wages occurred, the SFSU found it much more difficult to promote collective action and maintain collective agreements, even in its stronghold of East Lothian³

The history of collective bargaining throughout the 1920s shows that the position of the SFSU was gradually eroded as the willingness of the NFUS to enter into agreements declined. Two factors undoubtedly contributed to this, first, the general decline in SFSU membership, and second, the continued financial pressure under which many farmers were working, especially from 1928 onwards. But the legacy of the failure of state intervention in the 1917-21 period was strong. The SFSU continually campaigned for Scotland's exclusion from any statutory controls on farm labour, believing that trade union organisation and collective bargaining were the only answer. In 1924 the Union made sure that Scotland was excluded from the 1924 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) Act, introduced by the minority Labour administration for the benefit of farm workers in England and Wales⁴. The Union line was put forcefully in an article in the *Scottish Journal of Agriculture* in October 1924:

'...as it stands the argument for a legal minimum wage is a confession that the method is a second best, and something in the nature of a desperate remedy to cure a desperate disease. If we are considering a body of workers living at a standard denoted by 25s. a week, there is force in the argument. If the workers cannot escape that condition by their own efforts, some form of crutch must be provided, but a crutch is nothing but an encumbrance to a man with a pair of healthy legs.'⁵

¹ On a similar strike in England in 1923 see Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, ch.8.

² Duncan, J.F., 'Scottish farm labour' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 2 (1919), pp. 501-502; *Scottish Farm Servant*, October 1925, p. 112.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1927, pp.230-231.

⁴ Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Thomas Johnston Collection (SR 177), Letter from J.F.Duncan, 21 February 1923; Groves, R., *Sharpen the sickle*, pp.207-211. The BOAS concluded in 1923 that, given NFUS and SFSU opposition, wages board legislation was unnecessary; SRO, AF 43/216, *Agricultural Wages Board Bill*, 1923.

⁵ Duncan, J.F., 'The fixing of farm wages' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 7 (1924), p. 376.

Similarly when, in 1923, a Labour M.P. introduced a bill into Parliament providing for a statutory half-day on Saturdays for farm workers in Scotland, the Union regarded it as a distraction from its primary task of organisation and voluntary collective bargaining.¹ With no demand for intervention, the state, and in particular the BOAS, saw no reason to interfere in the process of partially-successful voluntary collective bargaining - 'probably the most effective use the Board can make of its powers is to stand aside and intervene only in the event of the parties being unable to arrive at an agreement.'²

The depression of the 1930s, as has been shown in chapter 3, marked a radical change in the condition of the Scottish agricultural labour market, a change which had major implications for institutional policy. Declining product prices and rising real wages meant that farmers focused on the cost of labour as a means to reduce total costs. In such a climate the remaining collective bargaining agreements soon broke down. Some industrial action took place in East Lothian, but never on the scale of 1923³. By the winter of 1933/4 the NFUS even refused to consider meeting local SFSU officials⁴. As a SFSU pamphlet commented, 'It was easier to take advantage of a favourable labour market when there was no collective agreement.'⁵ However, the legacy of the CPA meant that the Union remained against statutory intervention⁶. The SFSU was in a quandary, for the labour market began by 1932/3 to turn noticeably against its members, who lacked the protection of the minimum wage given to workers in England and Wales. Such a dilemma led Duncan to make the following conclusion:

'Neither the farmers nor farm workers in Scotland have been in favour of legal minimum wages. They believe that it is possible to work out a satisfactory system of collective bargaining in Scotland which would avoid the necessity of statutory fixing of wages and yet secure the maintenance of reasonable standards. We have had experience of collective bargaining in Scotland, and it has been shown that, when agreements have been made

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1923, p. 24.

² SRO, AF 43/184 *Scheme for promoting collective bargaining, 1921-34*, Minute sheet memorandum from Rose (Scottish Office) to Ramsay (BOAS), 12 September 1921.

³ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 17 May 1930.

⁴ SFSU, branch circular, February 1934.

⁵ T.G.W.U - Scottish Farm Servants' Section, *1919 Then and Now 1946* (Airdrie, 1946), pp. 2-3.

⁶ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 18 June 1932.

they have been accepted by the great body of farmers and workers, and have been generally observed without the need for legal enforcement....' [At the same time he was forced to admit that] 'if the standard of living continued to fall the state will be forced to protect the workers on the grounds of social policy, and that will mean the legal enforcement of minimum rates.'¹

In desperation, the SFSU formally approached the Secretary of State and the DOAS for assistance in setting up a government-administered collective-bargaining scheme, involving local DOAS conciliators, in December 1933².

Two things should be noted; firstly, the SFSU was not asking for a statutory minimum wage, Duncan in particular seeing it as a last resort, secondly, the DOAS must have been aware that, under the 1921 Corn Production Acts Repeal Act, they were required to help with conciliation if asked to do so³. The Department viewed the proposal favourably, but publicly adopted a neutral stance in order to avoid any clash with the NFUS, whose approval of the scheme was now sought. The NFUS appears to have stalled its reply, and the SFSU became increasingly irritated by the lack of activity, whilst the Department felt obliged to wait until it had received an official NFUS view. The issue was further complicated by the intervention of the Industrial Relations Department of the Ministry of Labour in February 1934, who opposed any idea of compulsory arbitration by the state and doubted that the scheme would work if voluntary negotiations broke down⁴. This is not surprising given Rodney Lowe's description of Ministry policy at the time as one of 'minimizing state responsibility (and embarrassment) and maximizing industrial freedom (and self-discipline)'⁵, and in particular the philosophy of the head of the Industrial Relations Department, Frederick Leggett, whose 'fanatical defence of free collective bargaining led him to resist any move by the state to give an industrial lead unless it had the full backing of both sides of industry.'⁶

¹ Duncan, J.F., 'The economic crisis and the Scottish farm worker' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 16 (1933), pp. 281-282.

² SRO, AF 83/184, *Agricultural wages. Scheme for promoting collective agreements, 1921-34*.

³ The correspondence concerning the CPA Repeal Act in 1921, and the SFSU scheme 1933-4 were placed in the same file.

⁴ SRO, AF 83/184, *Agricultural wages. Scheme for promoting collective agreements, 1921-34*.

⁵ Lowe, R., *Adjusting to democracy: the role of the Ministry of Labour in British politics, 1916-1939* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1986), p. 120.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 70.

Although those inside the DOAS considered the Ministry of Labour's attitude as 'childish'¹, it forced the Department to proceed more cautiously in its promotion of collective bargaining. Like the SFSU, the DOAS preferred such a negotiated scheme to any form of wage regulation. Matters were made worse when Duncan, in an effort to force some activity, wrote to the Secretary of State in August 1934 saying that his Union had no intention of negotiating directly with the NFUS, and that he regarded the proposed scheme as 'a matter for Government action.'² However, by December 1934 the DOAS, with Ministry of Labour backing, managed to get both sides around the table, and in March 1935 a draft scheme was drawn up. In a concession to the Ministry of Labour and the NFUS, a DOAS conciliator would only be brought in if a Joint Area Committee failed to be formed due to opposition from one side, or failed to reach an agreement; and even if the conciliator did intervene he had no statutory powers. The Central Executive of the NFUS had negotiated this in the belief that it was the way to avoid minimum wages, but their branch membership resoundingly rejected the scheme and the employers were forced to withdraw³. Why, given the increasing threat of minimum wage regulation, did the farmers act in such a manner?

It does appear that opposition from members in the North East, incensed at the refusal of the state to extend its deficiency payments scheme, already in operation for wheat, to oats and barley, worked against any form of negotiations involving the government⁴. In addition, considering the poor financial situation of most farms, farmers were not in the mood to tolerate any form of intervention over the cost of labour. The NFUS was, as a result of these concerns, split over whether voluntary wage regulation was a preferred option. Both officials and national representatives appear to have been concerned at the possible repercussions on membership levels, leading the Central Executive to act in a very cautious manner⁵. Not surprisingly, a majority of branches abstained from voting directly for or against the scheme when it was put forward, although 'the view of some of

¹ SRO, AF 43/184, *Agricultural wages. Scheme for promoting collective agreements, 1921-34*, Minute sheet, H.M.Conacher to Sir Robert Greig, 12 March 1934.

² SRO, AF 83/184, *Agricultural wages. Scheme for promoting collective agreements, 1921-34*.

³ SRO, AF 83/185, *Agricultural wages. Scheme for promoting collective agreements, 1934-5*

⁴ NFUS, Central Executive Minutes, 30 July 1936.

⁵ PRO, LAB 2/2017/5, *Agriculture-Scotland:-Proposal of the SFSU for a scheme for the promotion of collective agreements in the industry in Scotland, 1934-5*, Letter from Galbraith (Chief Conciliation Officer, Glasgow) to Leggett, 13 February 1935.

the leading people in the Farmers' Union [is] that the remaining 90 [branches] are more or less indifferent and certainly are in favour of a voluntary scheme if the alternative is statutory regulation.¹

In October 1935 a SFSU deputation to the Secretary of State complained of falling and varied wage levels and the abuse of the labour market position by farmers, and demanded statutory intervention to establish wages boards². Such a move placed the government in a difficult position, because its general policy on wage regulation was based upon the need for the agreement of both employers and workers to statutory intervention³. However, the successful operation of minimum wage committees in agriculture south of the border meant that it was difficult to refuse such a request.

'Sir Godfrey Collins [Secretary of State] was satisfied that some action must be taken, but he thought that further data must be obtained and a firm case made out if he were to carry legislation in the face of strong opposition from the farmers. The farm servants' organisation represents only some 5% of farm workers, and he would be open to severe criticism if he acted only on their representations. He would obviously be on much stronger ground if an impartial Committee found in favour of legislation.'⁴

The 'impartial committee' was to be the 1936 Committee on farm workers in Scotland ['Caithness' Committee]. Despite SFSU protests at a lack of direct representation, the composition of the Committee was well-balanced, with a landowner (Earl of Caithness), two farmers (Allison and Paton), two trade union officials (Elger and Dallas) and an economist (Gray)⁵. The Committee's Report concluded, unanimously, that the economic and social circumstances required a wages board system similar to that operating in England and Wales, but with a number of differences⁶. Most important was the Committee's recommendation that the Central Board should have the final say over minimum wages agreed by the local District Committees.

¹ *ibid*, 31 July 1935.

² SRO, AF 43/186 *Committee on farm workers in Scotland, 1935-6*. Interestingly Duncan was still opposed to the principle of wage regulation, but accepted that it was a necessary fall-back given the weakened labour market position of workers (Duncan, J.F., 'Organising farm workers' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 4 (1936), pp.256-257).

³ Bayliss, F.J., *British wages councils* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1962), p.30.

⁴ SRO, AF 43/186, *Committee on farm workers in Scotland, 1935-6*, Letter from Laird (BOAS) to Morris (Treasury), 30 November 1935.

⁵ SRO, AF 43/186, *Committee on farm workers in Scotland, 1935-6*.

⁶ *Report of the Committee on farm workers in Scotland* (P.P.1935-6, VIII, Cd.5217)

Such a provision had been defeated during the passing of the 1924 Act by combined Conservative and Liberal opposition. Both MAF and the Minister of Agriculture were concerned that if such a policy was legislated for in Scotland, then it would create a dangerous anomaly with the English system¹. In addition to this, Caithness recommended the appointment of only one independent member on the local committees rather than the three under the 1924 Act. The reasoning behind these two proposals was that it would be more palatable to the farmers if only one independent member interfered with the enforced bargaining between worker and employer representatives, and a strong Central Board was required to ensure that the correct general principles, particularly with reference to the valuation of perquisites, were followed.

In the end the 1937 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act adopted the 'English' model rather than the unanimous Caithness recommendations for the several reasons². In 1936 the Secretary of State (Collins) died and was replaced by Walter Elliott, previously Minister of Agriculture, an individual who was already familiar with the workings of the 1924 Act. The DOAS itself was concerned both with the increased power proposed for the Central Board and the position of a single independent member especially given the experience of the 'independent' chairmen under the CPA in 1917-21. In addition, the Government faced opposition from a number of Conservative Peers and wished to ensure a smooth passage through Parliament for the Bill.

The introduction of the 1937 Act with the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board (SAWB) and the District Agricultural Wage Committees (DAWCs) was far from smooth. In March 1937 it had been accepted by all sides that nomination of representatives from the NFUS/SCA and SFSU was the only practical way of filling the Committees in most districts³. The SAWB was really only a 'rubber-stamp' to the decisions made by the DAWCs, and the

¹ PRO, MAF 47/31, *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act, 1937: Possible repercussions on wages administration in England & Wales, 1935-8*; the Minister of Agriculture made it clear that he would oppose increased power for the Central Board in Cabinet.

² PRO, MAF 47/31, *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act, 1937: Possible repercussions on wages administration in England & Wales, 1935-8*; SRO, AF 43/187, *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Bill, 1937*. At one point Elliott attempted to reassure Tory Peers by claiming that the Bill would actually reduce the expansion of trade unionism in Scottish agriculture, see SRO, AF 43/452, *Wages of Farm Servants. Legislation, 1936-7*, 'Note of meeting between the Secretary of State and Peers, 16 February 1937'.

³ SRO, AF 43/187, *Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Bill, 1937*.

real problems came when the Committees first met. Examination of the minutes of two of the DAWCs showed that the majority of decisions were made as a result of intervention by the 'independent' members, with a bewildering series of motions from both sides until the 'independents' got a result they considered satisfactory¹. However, on a number of occasions representatives from one side or the other walked out of meetings, for example, this occurred in the Lothians DAWC twice in 1938. In one case in the Lothians, and in the North-East DAWC and the Ross and Cromarty DAWC (where the employers had walked out), the meetings continued to pass minimum wage regulations without both sides being present².

There was a significant jump in both real wage rates and the cost of labour to farmers in 1938³; and it seems difficult to argue against the case of minimum wages increasing labour costs and reducing employment levels - the classic 'minimum wage' effect⁴. Compared to the regime under the CPA, the 1937 Act certainly appears to have been more effective.

Table 3 shows that in 1938 16% of workers inspected were being underpaid, and 10% in 1939; the higher figure almost certainly being related to the time it took farmers and workers to get used to the new legislation⁵. Six cases prompted legal action in 1939, during 1938 the DOAS took a more lenient attitude in recognition of a needed period of adjustment⁶. There are problems with making a direct link between the minimum wages and the real wage rise of 1938. The minimum wage orders only came into operation between June and November 1938, and the Tenth Economic Report on Scottish Farming claimed that 'the fixing of minimum rates of wages under the new Act could hardly have had any influence on the rise in wages

¹ SRO, AF 59/113, *Minutes of Agricultural Wages Committee: District No.6 (Lothians), 1937-68*; AF 59/115, *Minutes of Agricultural Wages Committee: District No.8 (Dumfries, Kirkcudbright & Wigtown), 1937-68*. I would like to thank the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department for permission to examine these 'closed' files. The position of independent members on wage committees is discussed at length by Bayliss, F.J., *British wages councils*, ch.7.

² SRO, AF 59/127, *Labour safety & wages: parliamentary questions and ministerial correspondence, 1936-66*; AF 59/238, *Scottish Agricultural Wages Board. Legal advice on board and wage committees' questions, 1938-65*.

³ See chapter 3.

⁴ The impact of minimum wages on employment levels has received a considerable amount of attention in the United States; Ehrenberg, R.G. & Smith, R.S., *Modern labor economics: theory and public policy* (Scott, Foresman & Co., Illinois, 1988), pp.77-88.

⁵ SRO, AF 59/127, *Labour safety & wages - parliamentary questions and ministerial correspondence, 1936-66*, notes prepared for Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State by Mr. Maxton, 29 November 1938.

⁶ *Twenty-seventh Report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland for 1938* (P.P.1938-9, IX, Cd.5968), p.102.

because the orders prescribing these rates were not brought into operation until towards the end of the period under review [1937/8].¹ However, the orders were effective as soon as they came into operation, and farmers who had agreed lower than minimum rates in May 1938 would have had to raise them immediately. Consideration should also be made of the state of the agricultural labour market², and, although some qualitative evidence points to a tightened labour market, agricultural unemployment in Scotland actually rose between 1937 and 1938. The DOAS itself reported that there was no general shortage of labour in 1938, indicating that the rise in wages was not caused by changed labour market conditions³. Therefore it appears difficult to conclude that the 1937 Act did not have a significant effect on real wage levels.

Table 3: Number of workers investigated under the 1937 Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Scotland) Act

Year	Cases investigated arising out of		Total Cases	Number of infringements
	Complaints	Test Inspections		
1938*	2047	628	2675	431
1939	2271	1434	3705	377

Source: *Twenty-seventh report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland for the year 1938* (P.P.1938-9, IX, Cd.5968), pp.101-2; *Report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland for the ten years, 1939-1948* (P.P.1948-9, XI, Cd.7717), p.21

Note: *1938 figures are for July to December only

Further state intervention in the collective bargaining process came in the form of the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act. This resulted from a general demand by M.P.s for legislation on the matter and the report of the ensuing

¹ *Scottish Farming. Tenth economic report 1937-8* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1939), pp.2-3

² SRO, AF 70/409, *Scottish Agricultural Advisory Council. Minutes of meetings, 1934-8*, 25 January 1937; SFSU branch circular, October 1937.

³ *Twenty-seventh report of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland*, pp.13-15.

Committee¹. The main problem for the 'Amrulee' Committee was not whether holidays with pay should be legislated for, but how they could be implemented. The favoured method was to use trade and wages boards, and therefore agriculture was drawn into the legislation. The Act left the adoption of holidays with pay open to the DAWCs in Scotland. Officially the DOAS kept its role merely to advising the DAWCs as to the meaning of the legislation², and nearly all the DAWCs readily adopted regulations in line with the Act, which in any case only imposed seven holidays per annum with only three to be taken consecutively. However, in Dumfries and Galloway, the employers successfully opposed the introduction of holidays with pay requirements, and it was only the intervention of the Chairman that persuaded them that they were out of line with the rest of the country and should change their attitude³. The Holidays with Pay Act never had long enough in operation before September 1939 to have an impact⁴; but its importance is in the continuing willingness of the state and legislature to intervene in the Scottish agricultural labour market throughout the 1930s.

¹ *Report of the Committee on holidays with pay* (P.P. 1937-38, XII, Cd.5724); Bayliss, F.J., *British wages councils*, pp.41-43.

² SRO, AF 59/66, *Holidays with Pay Bill and Act 1938 - notes, 1938*. However the DOAS was concerned that the Holidays with Pay Act would overburden the DAWCs; PRO, MAF 47/40, *Holidays with Pay Act, 1938: application to agricultural workers*.

³ SRO, AF 59/115, *Minutes of Agricultural Wages Committee: District No.8 (Dumfries, Kirkcudbright & Wigtown), 1937-68*.

⁴ Bayliss, F.J., *British wages councils*, p.43.

Health and unemployment insurance

Attempts to provide for insurance against a loss of earning capacity were an important development in the nineteenth century, and there is no reason to believe that rural areas were excluded from this¹. However, in Scotland the use of friendly societies and 'clubs' by farm workers was generally infrequent, although in certain areas some societies and companies were regularly patronised². Neither was the farm servant a likely claimant for Poor Relief³. Scottish farm servants, on six-monthly and annual fixed contract, were unlikely to experience even short-term lay-offs, and were regarded as thrifty and frugal.

The early twentieth century did see a significant growth in insurance provision for Scottish farm workers, but it is difficult to separate this from the general impetus provided by the 1911 National Insurance Act. Prior to 1911 there is evidence of the growing appeal of sickness and death benefits to farm workers in Scotland. Reports in the *Scottish Farmer* consistently refer to the success of the 'International Ploughmen's Society for Scotland', based in Arbroath with its members concentrated in Angus. In 1900 its membership was already 1,228 with capital of £1,317, growing to 1,574 members in 1909 with a capital fund of £2,806⁴. Therefore there was a gradual growth in demand for voluntary provision, undoubtedly provoked by the success of friendly societies and insurance companies in urban areas.

However, the introduction of the 1911 Act demonstrated how slow the development had been. Not surprisingly the farmers were against such provisions, the *Scottish Farmer* arguing that 'in view of the generally healthy state of the farm servants, it does not appear that he will derive any benefit from this outlay.'⁵ Evidence also points to the hostility of farm workers to the cost of compulsory state insurance, particularly in areas where voluntary

¹ Neave, D., *Mutual aid in the Victorian countryside: friendly societies in the rural East Riding 1830-1914* (Hull University Press, Hull, 1991).

² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.29; Pt.II, p.25. The Prudential and the 'Oddfellows' and 'Forresters' appears to have been the most popular in Dumfries & Galloway and East Lothian/Fife/Clackmannan; *ibid*, Pt.I p.102, Pt.II, pp.25, 26 and 114.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, pp.33, 58-60, 89, 104, 72-73, 92, 106. It must also be remembered that the Scottish Poor Law was noted for its lack of provision for the able-bodied poor; Crowther, M.A., 'Poverty, health and welfare' in W.H.Fraser and R.J.Morris (eds.), *People and society in Scotland, 1830-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1990), pp.265-289.

⁴ *Scottish Farmer*, 18 August 1900, p.660, 15 March 1902, p.215, 28 July 1906, p.619, 17 August 1907, p.690, 25 June 1908, p.75, 31 July 1909, p.644. The last report of the membership of this society was in 1913, p.786, 2141 members, capital fund £3197.

⁵ *Scottish Farmer*, 9 September, 1911, p.797.

provision had been non-existent. For example, in the 'Turra Coo' incident of 1913 farmers and workers united to repossess a cow that had been seized from a farmer who had refused to pay any contributions. Fenton, in his study of the incident, readily identified the causes behind such an action.

'It [the National Insurance Act] was actively disliked by many in lowland rural areas because neither employer nor employed wanted to pay good money for stamps, for benefits the workers might never see; for the countryside view was that ill health was rarer there than in the towns and at that period unemployment was not a rural problem.'¹

Patriarchal landowners and farmers saw in the 1911 Act an opportunity to promote self-help and thrift amongst Scottish farm servants, and reduce the cost of insurance to the employers, by establishing a separate scheme for Scottish farm servants. In 1912, the result was the formation of the Scottish Rural Workers' Friendly Society (later the Scottish Rural Workers' Approved Society - SRWS) under the auspices of the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture². The Society took in all types of rural workers, not just the regular farm servants, and therefore its potential membership is difficult to assess; but by all accounts the Society was a success.

By 1914 membership was nearly 70,000; but it then stabilised until the late 1920s/early 1930s when a second period of dramatic growth occurred, which may have been linked to the increased employment insecurity in rural areas at the time (Table 4)³. The SRWS was not purely agricultural, though a majority of its members did work in farming⁴. The main problem faced by the Society was how to dispose of its growing capital fund, caused by the low level of health claims made by its members; its ability to increase benefits being limited by the Scottish Board of Health⁵. Also the low level of general

¹ Fenton, A., *The Turra Coo: a legal episode in the popular culture of north-east Scotland* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1989), p. 2.

² SCA Business Committee minutes, 24 January 1912; Directors Committee minutes, 8 May 1912. The attitude of the SCA to the 1911 Act is given in a memorandum in SCA Directors' minutes, 6 July 1911.

³ Neave concluded that membership of friendly societies in East Yorkshire was positively linked to the fluctuating fortunes of agriculture and agricultural wages, and he paints a very different picture of experience in this area with membership of friendly societies declining rapidly from the 1910s onwards (Neave, D., *Mutual aid in the Victorian countryside*, ch.3).

⁴ *Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance. Minutes of evidence* (HMSO, London, 1931), p.1143. The National Federation of Rural Approved Societies estimated that 70% of its members were in agriculture, and the SRWS was one of its largest constituent members.

⁵ *Scottish Farmer*, 27 December 1924, p.1622, 20 March 1926 p.374. In 1926 the SRWS was paying out the highest benefits that it was legally allowed.

unemployment in rural Scotland meant that contribution income remained high¹.

Table 4: Membership and assets of the Scottish Rural Workers' Approved Society, 1914-35

Year	Male	Female	Total	Financial Reserves (£)*
1914	53172	16358	69710	
1916			73523	320000
1918	54310	15710	70020	
1919			70215	614588
1924				767534
1925	51906	17993	69899	1084906
1926	54080	19953	74033	930494
1927			74904	953868
1930	61622	25613	87235	1042580
1934	72080	30878	102958	1141440
1935			106903	

Source: *Scottish Farmer*, 7 November 1914, pp.1057-8, 6 January 1917, p.12, 2 August 1919, p.741, 28 August 1920, p.993, 27 December 1924, p.1622, 26 June 1926, p.808, 6 August 1927, p.1079, 4 August 1928, p.1045, 27 June 1931, p.928, 28 December 1935, p.1793, 27 June 1936, p.887.

Notes: *Financial reserves are taken as the size of the capital fund.

SFSU opinion was divided on the benefits on National Health Insurance. Some elements would have nothing to do with the 1911 Act, but others saw the insurance provisions as a way of boosting union membership. The Union did eventually set up its own friendly society, but the delay meant that the SRWS had a head start². The SFSU's society appears to have suffered from financial limitations, especially when membership of the union fell during the 1920s.

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 4 August 1928, p.1045.

² NLS, Duncan Papers, Acc. 5601(4), no.4, pp.22-23.

With Scottish farm workers being successfully provided for with health insurance, the next possible extension of state provision was unemployment insurance. However, all evidence points to a consistent lack of unemployment in Scottish agriculture during the 1910s and 1920s¹. In 1921 agriculture was excluded when most workers were brought in to the state unemployment insurance scheme. Throughout the 1920s the issue was raised in Scotland, but was firmly rejected. In the *Scottish Farm Servant* of June 1924 the SFSU made its view on unemployment insurance clear; there was simply no case for providing a service that had no demand and would cost both workers and employers in contributions². Such a view was confirmed by the 1926 Inter-Departmental Committee on Agricultural Unemployment Insurance:

'At the outset we recognise the fact that there is a difference between the case as presented to the Committee from England and Wales and from Scotland, respectively. In Scotland the risk of unemployment in agriculture appears to be less than in England and Wales, though this fact would not, in our view, be sufficient, in itself, to justify differentiation. The conditions of farm service differ, generally speaking, in the two countries. In Scotland there has been, on the whole, greater stability of farming conditions than in England and Wales. The fact which most impresses us, however, is that there is no evidence that a scheme of compulsory insurance is desired by, or would be acceptable to, either employers or workers in Scotland. On the contrary, representations were strongly made on behalf of organisations representing both classes against the extension of the system to agriculture. In these circumstances, we are not prepared to recommend that in Scotland workers in agriculture should be compulsorily insured against the risk of unemployment....'³

Changes came in 1929 when the SFSU, in reaction to the weakening position of its members in the labour market, altered its policy to one in favour of unemployment insurance⁴. In addition, the election of a Labour government meant that the state was more likely to view favourably the extension of unemployment insurance to agriculture. In October 1929 an inter-departmental conference, involving MAF, DOAS and the Ministry of Labour, was held to discuss the possibility of extension to agriculture. At the conference the DOAS moved strongly to protect Scottish interests, and

¹ See chapter 3.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1924, p.33.

³ MAF/DOAS, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on agricultural unemployment insurance* (HMSO, London, 1926), p.34.

⁴ SFSU, Executive Committee minutes, 27 October 1929.

successfully brought forward the suggestion that benefit rates should be higher in Scotland (because of higher wages) and contributions lower (because of lower levels of unemployment); it also pointed out that, despite the recent change in the views of the SFSU, the majority of the Scottish agricultural population was against unemployment insurance. MAF and Ministry of Labour officials were sceptical about the practicality of such a suggestion, and in a ministerial meeting the Secretary of State for Scotland (Adamson) accepted that a single scheme for the whole industry was the only practical way to proceed. However, in January 1930 a DOAS memo continued to argue that the case for agricultural unemployment insurance in Scotland had yet to be convincingly made, and that there was a need for a separate Scottish scheme if it was to be imposed¹.

The whole matter was referred to the 1931 Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance. It was faced with a bewildering variety of evidence at a time when the whole position of the Scottish agricultural labour market was radically changing. Not surprisingly the NFUS was vehemently opposed. Meanwhile, the SFSU argued that there was now a need for unemployment insurance, but accepted that implementing it might be difficult since many workers and farmers could be opposed to the payment of contributions (they cited reactions when the National Health Insurance Act was introduced)². In addition, the National Federation of Rural Approved Societies, an umbrella organisation of which the SRWS was a member, claimed that circumstances did not require state intervention³. The Association of County Councils in Scotland gave evidence of rising agricultural unemployment in some areas, with one official concluding that the size of potential contributions rather than the principle of unemployment insurance was the main problem⁴. The Royal Commission was only able to conclude that, while there was a strong case for introduction, there were a number of difficulties, notably, a lack of accurate unemployment indicators, problems in administering a scheme with a large number of widely-scattered small production units, and differing conditions in Scotland relative to England and Wales. It therefore recommended that the question be further

¹ SRO, AF 43/339, *Agricultural workers unemployment insurance. Conference on extension of & Royal Commission, 1929-31*.

² *Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance. Minutes of evidence*, pp.1071-1074, 1082-1083.

³ *ibid*, p.1143.

⁴ *ibid*, pp.564, 579-581.

investigated by the newly-formed Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee (UISC).

By 1934, with the deepening agricultural crisis and rising unemployment, the argument for inclusion had strengthened in Scotland. The Federation of Rural Approved Societies changed its policy in favour of inclusion¹, and the SFSU was now under no illusions as to the feelings of workers both in and outside the Union.

'In June 1931 I gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance on behalf of the Union. At that time I could not say that the Union could speak on behalf of all the workers on this question, but I am now convinced that the great majority of farm workers in Scotland are in favour of being insured. There has been a remarkable change of opinion during the past two years as a result of the growing unemployment and the difficulty of farm workers who are unable to secure employment on farms finding any other employment. In every district in rural Scotland the number of unemployed farm workers is steadily growing.'²

When the UISC reported on the details of an agricultural unemployment insurance scheme, Scotland presented it with a number of difficulties. Statistical evidence from the 1931 Census and the Rural Approved Societies indicated that there was little difference in unemployment rates between Scotland and England & Wales³. However, it had been argued that the prevalence of long hiring terms in Scotland (6-12 months) meant that seasonal unemployment was likely to be less of a problem⁴. On the other hand, the case for a separate Scottish scheme, pressed so strongly by the DOAS in 1929, had evaporated in the light of falling wages (relative to England) and rising unemployment⁵. Therefore the UISC was able to recommend a scheme for agriculture. It was to be separate from the general scheme which covered other industries, because agricultural wages were lower. This meant that workers could only afford reduced contributions, and benefits would have to be kept lower so as not to encourage unemployment.

¹ PRO, MAF 47/18, *Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture) Act, 1933-6*.

² SRO, AF 43/340, *Agricultural workers unemployment insurance. Conference on extension of & Royal Commission, 1932-4*, Letter from Duncan to the DOAS, 23 October 1933.

³ *Report of the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee, in accordance with Section 20 of the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1934, on the question of the insurance against unemployment of persons engaged in agriculture* (P.P.1934-5, XIV, Cd.4786), pp.12-3. The Committee rejected NFUS arguments that there was very little unemployment in Scotland.

⁴ *ibid*, pp.35-37.

⁵ PRO, MAF 47/18, *Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture) Act, 1933-6*, minutes of Evidence given to the UISC, 11 October 1934, pp.43-44.

In addition, unemployment in farming was generally below that of other sectors, thus changing the actuarial assumptions for the operation of the fund¹. The question of the long hirings was to be solved by rebates on contributions for those hired under such terms².

The 1936 Unemployment Insurance (Agriculture) Act incorporated most of the features of the 1934 Report, including the long hiring discounts. The impact of the 1936 Act is difficult to assess in Scotland, particularly with the introduction of minimum wage legislation the following year. Given that it raised the cost of labour to employers, it is difficult to dispute the conclusion that it reduced the demand for labour, but this must be balanced against the social benefits to farm workers in an industry where unemployment remained a danger throughout the 1930s. Overall, the insurance fund for agriculture produced a continual surplus of contributions over expenditure, leading to benefits being increased in 1938³. The significance of the 1936 legislation remains the willingness of the state to intervene in the Scottish agricultural labour market, following the severe structural impact of the depression.

¹ *Report of the Unemployment Insurance Statutory Committee*, pp.16-20.

² *ibid*, pp.35-37.

³ Tillyard, F., *Unemployment insurance in Great Britain, 1911-48* (Thames Bank, Leigh-on-Sea, 1949), p.161-162.

Housing

The condition of urban housing and the development of housing policy during the early twentieth century is one that has attracted considerable historical examination¹. The concern here is primarily with the role that housing played in institutional negotiations and legislative intervention in the Scottish agricultural labour market².

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the condition of working class housing, including that of rural workers, was receiving increased public attention³. Early legislation to enable local authorities to improve the quality of housing was a dismal failure in rural areas in England and Wales⁴. With specific reference to Scotland, the historian is fortunate in having the 1912-17 Royal Commission on Housing, the majority of whose evidence was collected prior to the outbreak of war. The Commission found that housing legislation in rural areas was totally ineffective, even more so than in England and Wales⁵. They also identified a lack of information on housing conditions as providing a major obstacle to improvement, one County Medical Officer confirming that 'there is little spare time for systematic house to house inspection.'⁶ Of the 31 recommendations made on rural housing, 13 applied directly to action by local authorities. As well as drawing up general specifications for adequate housing, the Commission demanded that local authorities be empowered to make loans for house improvement, and also to purchase and build housing in rural areas until there was a satisfactory supply of quality accommodation⁷. These were radical proposals

¹ Butt, J., 'Working-class housing in Glasgow, 1900-39' in I. MacDougall (ed.), *Essays in Scottish labour history* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1978), pp.143-169; Daunt, M.J., *House and home in the Victorian city: working-class housing, 1850-1914* (Edward Arnold, London, 1983); Rodger, R. (ed.), *Scottish housing in the twentieth century* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1989).

² As pointed out in chapter 3, nearly all regular farm workers in Scotland were housed in property owned or leased by their employer.

³ Mingay, G., 'The rural slum' in S.M. Gaskell (ed.), *Slums* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1990), p.118.

⁴ Mingay, 'The rural slum', p.121. The 1909 Act may have added to the housing shortages by closing or demolishing unfit property. Mingay estimated that local authorities built 470, closed 5,000 and improved 15,000 rural houses in England between 1909 and 1913, this compares to over half a million houses in total; pp.122-3.

⁵ *Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population in Scotland, rural and urban. Evidence* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.280.

⁶ *Report of Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population in Scotland, rural and urban* (P.P. 1917-18, XIV, Cd.8731), p.168; *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.541.

⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on housing*, pp.181.

and would have involved a transformation in the role and attitudes of Scottish rural local government. However, the Commission was split, and the Minority Report's recommendations were somewhat different; they rejected the Majority's call for substantial state intervention, though accepting there was a need for increased public inspection of housing conditions which had been absent in the past¹.

In fact further legal intervention had already occurred with the 1914 Housing (No.2) Act, which empowered the BOAS to acquire land for housing purposes if there was a demand for new housing and if the local authority could not be persuaded to take any action. On the other hand, the Board was well aware that the demand was more for improvement of existing property rather than for new cottages, and that persuading local authorities to do anything would prove extremely difficult. As it turned out the war intervened, and when the Act was repealed in 1927 the BOAS explained that the Act was effectively useless and it had never exercised the relevant powers². However, during the war, opinion emerged within the Board that it could well have some role to play in intervention in the rural housing market, especially to reduce the level of tied housing. It rejected the argument for giving direct assistance to landowners or farmers, or for funding to local authorities, and argued that the Board could exploit economies of scale if large-scale expenditure were to take place³.

Therefore, by the end of hostilities, although much discussion had taken place, particularly centred around the Royal Commission, there was a considerable amount of disagreement on what, if any, role the public sector should play in the provision of housing for Scottish farm workers. Landowners and farmers were likely to oppose any efforts to change radically the present system of tied housing, whilst the Treasury and local authorities were unlikely to be enthusiastic about substantial public expenditure in an area where the arguments for intervention had yet to reach some form of consensus. One underlying issue remained. General concern about the condition of working class housing was considerable and,

¹ Of the twelve members of the Royal Commission on housing, four signed the Minority report including Baron Lovat (a substantial landowner in Invernesshire) and Charles Carlow (Managing Director of Fife Coal Co.); *Report of the Royal Commission on housing*, pp.424-432.

² SRO, AF 43/62, *Housing Act 1914. Housing (No.2) Act 1914, 1914-27*.

³ SRO, AF 43/93, *Reconstruction Committee. Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee, 1916-7*, 3a. Proposed answers to questions submitted by the Committee, 6 October 1916, Question 6.

although the rural problems were often less visible, the evidence given to the Royal Commission by all parties had clearly demonstrated that conditions were poor and there was a need for 'drastic improvement'¹.

The SFSU, the institution most likely to complain about the state of rural housing, rarely considered the issue until the mid 1920s. Given the conclusions of the Royal Commission and the general lack of resulting legislation, this is surprising. The SFSU priorities at the time were membership expansion and the development of collective bargaining with the NFUS. Housing was considered a secondary issue, and in any case while the Royal Commission was in progress the SFSU did have direct representation as its General Secretary (Duncan) was a member². In 1924 the BOAS had issued a further internal document advocating the need for public sector housing in rural areas for farm workers as a method of responding to the evidence from the 1917 Royal Commission³, but it was not until the report of the 1925 Conference on Agricultural Policy in Scotland (a conference that both the NFUS and the SFSU boycotted) that the issue reappeared in public policy discussions.

The 1925 Agricultural Conference had been called in order that the government might consult agricultural interests before producing its 1926 White Paper on Agriculture. The only matter relevant to labour that the Conference considered was that of housing, and its conclusions on housing policy were relatively stark.

'The various Housing Acts, so far as we are aware, provide no assistance of any kind for the improvement and modernising of existing houses, though such aid, which would help materially to solve the rural housing problem, is a clamant necessity. As regards the provision of new houses, these Acts have been of little or no benefit throughout the greater part of rural Scotland....In general...the Housing Acts have been framed with an eye to urban rather than to rural conditions, and the result of this is evident in the fact that they have led to very little building of any kind in agricultural districts and to almost none for the accommodation of farm workers.'⁴

¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on housing*, p.175.

² The question of housing was discussed on a number of occasions; however the focus of these discussions was on the abolition of the tied housing system which was seen as a handicap to workers during wage bargaining; *Scottish Farm Servant*, August 1914, p.3, June 1916, p.14, October 1917, p.86, June 1920, p.45.

³ SRO, AF 43/94, *Reconstruction Committee. Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee, 1918-24*, BOAS response to Parliamentary question to the Minister of Agriculture, 27 March 1924. The BOAS accepted that the adoption of such a policy was a matter of public finance.

⁴ *Report of the Scottish Conference on agricultural policy* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1925), p.11.

They recommended that state subsidies should be made available for both improvements and new constructions. The BOAS immediately took advantage of such statements, arguing that local authorities should be persuaded by legislation to construct non-tied housing for farm workers, and that the state should provide financial assistance for approved improvements to existing properties¹. At the same time the SCA was lobbying the Secretary of State for funding for housing improvements². The most interesting point to note is the consistent advocacy by the BOAS of a policy of a reduction in tied housing and the need for direct financial assistance from the state for the construction of new houses. Such policies were also advocated by the Ministry of Agriculture, who considered that tied cottages provided both poor quality housing and affected the position of the worker when wage-bargaining³.

The result of these discussions was the first effective legislation on rural housing, the 1926 Housing (Rural Workers) Act, which provided for local authority grants and loans for farmers and landowners to improve cottages. The SFSU was incensed, declaring that grants and loans to landlords were only a method for the state to perpetuate poor quality rural housing - 'Doles for Landlords'⁴. The provisions of the 1926 Act were further strengthened in 1931 when another piece of legislation empowered local authorities to provide subsidies for the erection of new properties, but these facilities were suspended temporarily after a few months, owing to government cutbacks, and permanently in 1933⁵. In 1933 the Scottish Departmental Committee on Housing professed to being 'impressed by the success of schemes of assistance adopted by local authorities under the Housing (Rural Workers) Acts, 1926 and 1931.' Every county in Scotland had a scheme of assistance, and over 16,000 grants had been approved with £1,115,520 having been paid out⁶. The Committee's main concern was that the improvements made, were not of a high enough standard⁷.

¹ SRO, AF 43/209, *Conference of agricultural interests in Scotland, 1924-5*; AF 43/260, *Housing of rural workers. Recommendations of the Scottish Conference on agricultural policy, 1925*.

² SRO, AF 43/260, *Housing of rural workers. Recommendations of the Scottish Conference on agricultural policy, 1925*.

³ Savage, G.A., 'Friend to the worker: social policy at the Ministry of Agriculture between the wars' *Albion*, 19 (1987), pp.198-199.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, September 1926, p.83.

⁵ *Report on rural housing in Scotland* (P.P.1936-7, XI, Cd.5462), p.10.

⁶ *Report of Scottish Departmental Committee on housing* (P.P.1933-4, XII, Cd.4469), p.28.

⁷ *ibid*, p.57.

Meanwhile, in 1924-9 the SFSU launched a concerted campaign against the lack of the enforcement of regulations on public health that related to farm worker housing. It was particularly angry that local authorities and the Scottish Board of Health had failed to respond to complaints over housing conditions, and took its campaign to the Secretary of State and Scottish M.P.s., demanding that action by the local authorities be made compulsory¹. The Board of Health reacted by issuing a circular reminding local authorities of the requirements for inspection and further action under the Section 5 of the 1925 Housing (Scotland) Act². In September 1929 the Union went further in calling for public construction of rural housing, independent of the farmer's control³. It was not until June 1931, with a sympathetic Labour administration in power, that the SFSU was able to get a meeting with the Secretary of State, accompanied by Department of Health and Midlothian County Council officials, where it was demonstrated that the failure of local authorities to act under the law, and the use of the 1926 Act to 'patch up' houses that should have been demolished, was widespread⁴. The impact of this campaign was somewhat limited, the only definite results being that the Department of Health agreed in December 1931 to make a survey of farm cottages in Berwickshire⁵. The SFSU was unable to press its case further as it became absorbed in matters concerning its own survival. However, in the winter of 1933/4 it made another attempt to raise the matter with the Secretary of State and in the House of Commons, but little appears to have come of this⁶.

It was not until 1936/7 that further constructive action was taken, with the request by the Secretary of State for the Scottish Housing Advisory Committee to study the question of the workings of rural housing legislation. The Committee's Report gave a clear and concise analysis of the position. With regard to the requirement for County Councils to inspect housing under the 1925 Housing (Scotland) Act, the Committee found that this was wholly inadequate due primarily to inadequate staffing. In evidence the SFSU had been particularly contemptuous of the complete failure of government policy

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1929, pp.6-10, May 1929, pp.30-31.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1929, p.46.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, September 1929, p.103.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, July 1931, pp.70-71. In 1930 Duncan claimed that, with the exception of East Lothian, the 1926 Act had been used to finance the ordinary maintenance of cottages rather than substantial renovations (Duncan, J.F., 'The farm cottage in Scotland' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 13 (1930), p.153).

⁵ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 11 October 1931.

⁶ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 23 December 1933, 7 April 1934.

and regulations on this matter since 1924¹. On the question of the public funding of new houses, the Committee concluded that rural areas were being persistently disadvantaged by the lack of action by local authorities to make use of subsidies provided for in 1919, 1923 and 1924, and that the suspension of subsidies under the 1931 Act had further prevented this². There was, however, some debate as to the success of the grants for improvements scheme introduced under the 1926 Act. The NFUS had called for an increase in the size of grants (limited at the time to £100 or two-thirds of the cost), and for the availability of cheap credit if landlords were unable to get grants³. The SFSU remained strongly opposed to the idea of public money going towards the reconstruction of sub-standard properties.

'A very large proportion of the houses which have been "reconstructed" under these Acts, are so radically defective in structure, that it is impossible to bring them up to any reasonable standard of habitability. They remain damp, with inadequate windows, without proper storage facilities, with unventilated concrete or stone floors, and without water closets. In many cases the money has been spent in providing the minimum statutory requirements, and in carrying out repairs which were overdue, without adding anything to the existing accommodation. In some houses even the minimum statutory requirements have not been provided. While the houses which have been repaired are better than they were, many of them have been given a new lease of life, when they ought to have been closed, and a definitely lower standard of housing perpetuated for farm workers than is accepted for other workers. We contend that this is unjust to the farm workers, and bad public policy.'⁴

Their solution was the provision of houses for farm workers by local authorities. The Committee agreed with the SFSU, and its own surveys estimated that half the dwellings reconstructed under the 1926/1931 Acts were unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the majority of its members felt that the advantages of continuing with the grants system outweighed the disadvantages, despite the reservations made by the trade union representatives on the Committee (including Duncan)⁵. The Committee did accept that the provision of tied housing was a problem for farm workers,

¹ *Report on rural housing in Scotland*, pp.11-13; NLS Duncan Papers Acc.5601(4) no.3, pp.1-4.

² *Report on rural housing in Scotland*, pp.9-10.

³ NFUS President's Committee minutes, 14 July 1936.

⁴ NLS Duncan Papers Acc.5601(4) no.3, p.5.

⁵ *Report on rural housing in Scotland*, pp.27 and 64-65.

and that the aim of housing policy should be to reduce tied housing to a minimum, though such a policy faced a number of difficulties¹.

The DOAS broadly accepted the conclusions of the majority of the Committee, but was somewhat cautious about the ability of County Councils to provide housing to replace tied houses, though it broadly agreed with the desired aim of reducing the dependence of workers on their employers for accommodation². The government was willing to adopt the recommendations of the majority both in extending the grants scheme and in giving subsidies and encouragement to local authorities to provide council housing in rural areas for farm workers. The result was the 1938 Housing (Rural Workers) Amendment Act and Housing (Agricultural Population) (Scotland) Act³, an example of the willingness of the state to intervene directly to improve working-class housing, and to alter the conditions within the Scottish agricultural labour market during the 1930s.

Mingay, in his assessment of rural housing policy, has rightly questioned the effectiveness of state in the improvements made in rural housing during the interwar period, particularly relative to the problems of the 'rural slums'⁴.

Certainly initial efforts were limited in their application, but by the late 1930s the state had come to accept that it had an active role to play in the provision of adequate municipal housing in rural areas as a solution to conditions which had been easy to identify, but which were more difficult to cure.

¹ *Report on rural housing in Scotland*, pp.46-47. Reservations were again expressed about financial support for tied housing; *ibid*, p.65.

² SRO, AF 59/217, *Housing (Agricultural Population) (Scotland) Bill, 1937-43*.

³ Department of Health for Scotland, *Circular No.106 and 108* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1938). The impact of both pieces of legislation was curtailed by the outbreak of war.

⁴ Mingay, G., 'The rural slum', pp.139-141.

Conclusion

Institutional intervention, therefore, was governed by a number of factors. Most important was the economic functioning of the labour market; thus the SFSU continually promoted a policy of voluntary negotiations throughout the 1910s and 1920s, a period in which it felt that compulsory state intervention would be counterproductive to its members' interests. The major structural changes that occurred during the 1930s forced it to alter radically its views on both wage regulation and unemployment insurance. These views received a sympathetic, if slow, reaction from the state because of the application of similar policies elsewhere (wage regulation in English agriculture and unemployment insurance for most industrial workers). The general demand for health insurance resulted in the enforcement of the provision on Scottish agriculture in 1911 despite widespread opposition, and again in 1917 minimum wages were imposed on an industry which was unanimously opposed to them, for reasons of perceived national agricultural policy requirements.

The actual ability of both the trade union and the employers' association to affect state policy-making was a direct result of their acquisition of political and institutional links. Therefore the SFSU was sometimes quite effective because it had the backing of the Labour party and trade union movement, and established itself as the monopoly representative of Scottish farm labour. On the other hand, the NFUS was weakened by its inability to gain similar recognition as the only body of Scottish farmers, and its links into the national political machinery were less direct.

The effectiveness of the SFSU and the NFUS in implementing policy was also a function of the operational strength of the two organisations. When membership was falling, and financial conditions were poor, it was difficult to concentrate on policy campaigns when the prime aim was survival, as with the SFSU in the late 1920s/early 1930s. The SFSU, generally, found itself limited to the central areas of Scotland, where it retained most of its support, while the NFUS could easily claim a wider geographical coverage. However, the SFSU was a much more coherent and better organised institution, and this meant that its representative ability was often greater than its limited membership would suggest, as seen for example, in its success in campaigning for wage regulation in the mid 1930s. The NFUS continually lacked a centralised focus, with local branches, particularly at

county level, remaining relatively independent, and this made it very difficult to implement definite policies based on consensus, a fact most clearly demonstrated by the rejection of the proposed wages scheme in 1935. In general, the NFUS failed to develop the centralising administration and co-operative membership that the NFU had done by the late 1930s.

Such circumstances left the NFUS in a weak position when dealing with the state, and it is noticeable that in dealings with the SFSU, the county branches tended to predominate. The state itself was not a single monolith that could be appealed to. The BOAS had only a limited, but growing interest in labour, and in national policy-making terms it remained a small Edinburgh-based branch of the Scottish Office. Any independent views it had on intervention were restricted by limited public finances, for example over housing, and by policy decisions of larger ministries (notably MAF and the Ministry of Labour).

It has, therefore, been shown that institutional intervention was the result of a diverse number of factors; some of these were internal (the relative strengths of the SFSU and the NFUS), but the deciding factors tended to be external - the changing economics of the labour market and the development of state policies which were influenced by issues outside Scottish agriculture.

Chapter 5: Local case studies

The intention of the second section of the thesis (chapters 6-8) is to undertake a detailed examination of labour market operations within the locality. This enables a study to be made of the microeconomic functioning of the market, with particular reference to the nature and enforcement of contracts, and to labour mobility, and the sociological relationship between employers and workers at the point of production (the farm), a relationship which underpinned the economic behaviour of both farmers and farm servants¹.

As rural historians and sociologists have discovered, the only effective method of studying such matters is to focus on a particular locality². This is because there is a widespread divergence in the economic and social experience of rural areas, and, especially when dealing with agriculture, a function of the impact of physical geography on agricultural production. There are drawbacks with the emphasis on the study of one locality. The specific mix of casual factors within any area is often unique and, therefore, it is sometimes unwise to assume that a generalisation made for one geographical area fits automatically into another. Such a fact was clearly recognised by Campbell in his work on the south-west of Scotland:

'Scotland's major differences in agricultural potential are determined by the country's marked contrasts of climate, topography, and soil; and also, more effectively in the past than today, by the ease or otherwise of reaching urban markets. Generalisations based on the experience of one area are often misleading if applied to another without the qualifications which only detailed local study can provide. Such studies are sparse for the later nineteenth century, especially in the lowlands. It is deceptively easy to fall into the trap of applying generalisations derived from the better-known experience of the English eastern counties not only to the relatively comparable area of south-east Scotland but to the contrasting south-west. Such neglect is surprising.'³

¹ On the importance of sociological relations in the agricultural labour market, see Newby, H., 'The low earnings of agricultural workers: a sociological approach' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 23 (1972), pp.15-24.

² For sociologists see Littlejohn, J., *Westrigg: the sociology of a Cheviot parish* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963) [Scottish Borders] and Newby, H., *The deferential worker: a study of farm workers in East Anglia* (Penguin, London, 1979) [Suffolk]; and for historians see Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men: rural radicalism in Norfolk* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985) [Norfolk] and Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses: the horselads of East Yorkshire* (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991) [East Yorkshire].

³ Campbell, R.H., 'Little better than British slavery': the agriculture of Cunninghame in the late nineteenth century' in Cruickshank, G. (ed.), *A sense of place. Studies in Scottish local history* (Scotland's Cultural Heritage, Edinburgh, 1988), p.27.

Previous work by historians of farm labour has tended to focus on particular geographical areas, Howkins on Norfolk, Caunce on East Yorkshire, and most importantly, Carter on the north-east of Scotland. Carter himself bemoaned the fact that, prior to his work, the history of Scottish rural society had been skewed towards the south-east¹. In fact Carter's book remains the most important piece of research on lowland Scottish rural society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore the danger now lies in assuming that the patterns he identified for the north-east hold for the rest of Scotland². The focus in the present local case studies will be outside the north-east; and rather than fall into the trap identified by Campbell by selecting a particular county, the logic was to examine two areas within the same general region (southern Scotland), which had different production structures, and locations within the socio-economic geography of the region. Given these parameters the two counties that have been chosen for specific study are Dumfries and East Lothian (see Map in Introduction).

The differing production structures of the two counties are best described in the 1936 publication *Regional types of British agriculture*³. The Lothians were identified as the "Garden of Scotland", forming "one of the most favoured, most productive, and most-highly rented parts of agricultural Britain, more particularly on the lower coastal belt situated east of Edinburgh [East Lothian]".⁴ Moving south from the coastal plain, production became increasingly semi-arable as the southern part of East Lothian penetrated the Lammemuir hills which formed the boundary between it and the Borders. The Lammemuirs were primarily sheep-arable country, but most of East Lothian was intensively worked under complex six or seven course rotations, associated with the winter feeding of cattle and sheep. However, many of the crops, particularly wheat, barley and potatoes, were sold off the farm (East Lothian had a particular speciality in the production of early

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), pp.178-181.

² For an example of this see Dickson, A. (ed.), *Scottish capitalism: class, state and nation from before the Union to the present* (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1980), pp.258-262, where the analysis of rural lowland social relations is based purely on the work of Carter.

³ Maxton, J.P. (ed.), *Regional types of British agriculture* (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1936), chs. 14-15. For maps of the geographical distribution of crops and livestock in Scotland, see Coppock, J.T., *An agricultural atlas of Scotland* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1976), ch.7.

⁴ Maxton, J.P. (ed.), *Regional types of British agriculture*, p.282.

potatoes), and the county drew a high proportion of its agricultural income from arable output. The greatest concentration of large, highly-rented arable farms occurred in the eastern part of the county around Dunbar, where A.D. Hall commented in 1911 that 'we had not imagined that the management of arable land could reach such perfection, even with every advantage of soil and climate.'¹

Table 1: Acreage of crops and numbers of livestock per 100 acres of cultivated land, Dumfries, East Lothian and lowland Scotland, 1921

	Dumfries	East Lothian	Lowland Scotland
Arable	54.3	81.6	70.7
Wheat	0.1	5.8	1.6
Barley	0.2	13.4	3.5
Oats	17.4	16.3	21.0
Potatoes	1.9	7.1	3.3
Turnips	6.3	11.7	8.6
Rotation Grass	27.7	23.9	31.5
Permanent Grass	45.7	19.4	29.3
Cattle	26.3	9.5	22.9
Sheep ^a	85.0	79.7	57.7
Rough Grazing	158.0	41.7	99.6

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1921

Note: ^a per 100 acres of cultivated land and rough grazing

Meanwhile, Dumfries was split into two different areas by the 1936 guide. In the north and east (around the towns of Sanquhar, Moffat and Langholm) the county embraced the Southern Uplands where production was dominated by hill sheep, primarily Cheviots. In the main part of the county, closer to the towns of Dumfries, Lockerbie and Annan, the stress was on intensive livestock production.

¹ Hall, A.D., *A pilgrimage of British farming 1910-1912* (John Murray, London, 1914), p.137.

'Dumfries shows mixed farming in all its variations. Dairying (mainly for liquid milk), the sale of prime dairy stock, poultry, pigs, cattle rearing and feeding, ewe flocks and early lambs, sheep fattening on turnips, and growing of second early and maincrop potatoes - the latter enterprise generally concentrated on the fine soils of the Annan district - have varied emphasis in different localities. There is only one rotation that is followed to any great extent, namely oats, greencrop, oats (with grass seeds), hay, and a varying number of years in grass. Quite frequently the seeds are grazed instead of being hayed....

Milk production has increased greatly in this county in post-war years, and it now ranks high among the largest milk-producing counties in Scotland. The fattening of cattle is practised on farms fairly well distributed among the dairy farms.'¹

Table 2: Percentage of holdings by size group and tenure, Dumfries, East Lothian and lowland Scotland, 1921

	Dumfries	East Lothian	Lowland Scotland
1-5 acres	18.4	11.4	13.3
5-50 acres	32.8	29.1	37.2
50-300 acres	43.6	30.3	44.5
Over 300 acres	5.2	29.2	5.0
Owner-occupiers	15.8	19.2	13.1
Average size of holding (acres)	90.3	190.3	59.0

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1921

Both counties had a strong tradition of complex, mixed agriculture, which was spread throughout lowland Scotland, with upland areas that concentrated on hill sheep. However, much of East Lothian was dominated by large farms, which relied on the sale of farm crops, supplemented by the earnings from cattle and sheep-feeding (see Tables 1 and 2). Dumfries was a county of smaller farms, close to the lowland Scottish average, a genuinely mixed livestock area with a growing emphasis on milk production. Three series of statistics clearly demonstrate the differences between the two

¹ Maxton, J.P. (ed.), *Regional types of British agriculture*, p.311; see also Hall, A.D., *A pilgrimage of British farming*, p.406.

counties; 46 % of cultivated land was occupied by permanent grass in Dumfries compared to 19% in East Lothian (Table 1), the five main crops (wheat, barley, oats, potatoes and turnips) contributed over half the acreage in East Lothian as against 26% in Dumfries (Table 1), and finally, holdings over 300 acres accounted for 5 % of all farms in Dumfries and 29 % in East Lothian (Table 2). Except for the high proportion of permanent grass, Dumfries was typical of lowland Scotland. The same could not be said of East Lothian, with its high incidence of cash crops and large farms, and low incidence of permanent grass/rough grazing and cattle/dairy cows. Therefore the two counties exhibited substantial differences in their production structures.

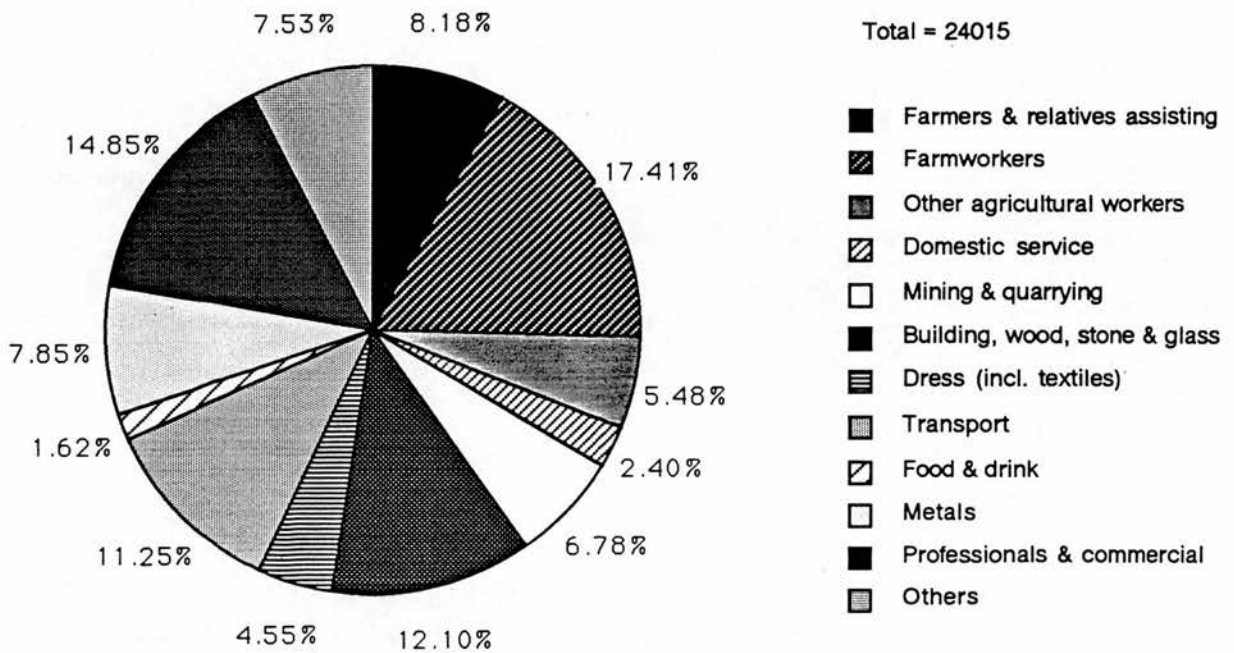
In occupational terms, both East Lothian and Dumfries had large agricultural elements, the latter to a greater extent (Graphs 1 and 2)¹. Outside farming Dumfries demonstrated a wide range of occupations, as would be expected of an area of small market towns servicing the surrounding countryside. In East Lothian there was direct competition to the dominance of agriculture from mining, which employed over a fifth of the male workforce. This, combined with the opportunities available in a major urban centre such as Edinburgh, meant that the patterns of labour demand were somewhat different from the more isolated and rural South-West. Establishing an accurate picture of female employment in the two counties is more difficult. The problems of utilising the census as a source for identifying female occupations has already been discussed with relevance to agriculture², and data on other industries may be just as unreliable.

¹ For details of the groupings created in Graphs 1 and 2 see Appendix 2.

² See chapter 3.

Graph 1

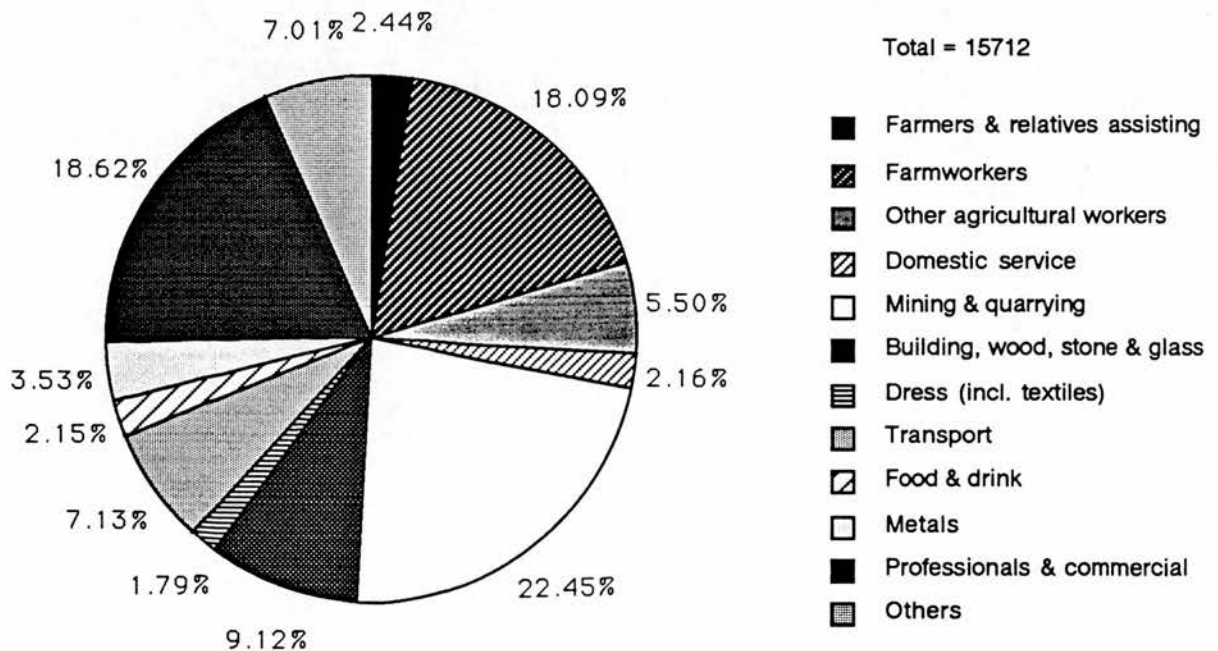
Male occupations, Dumfries, 1921



Source: Report of the thirteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1924), Table 3

Graph 2

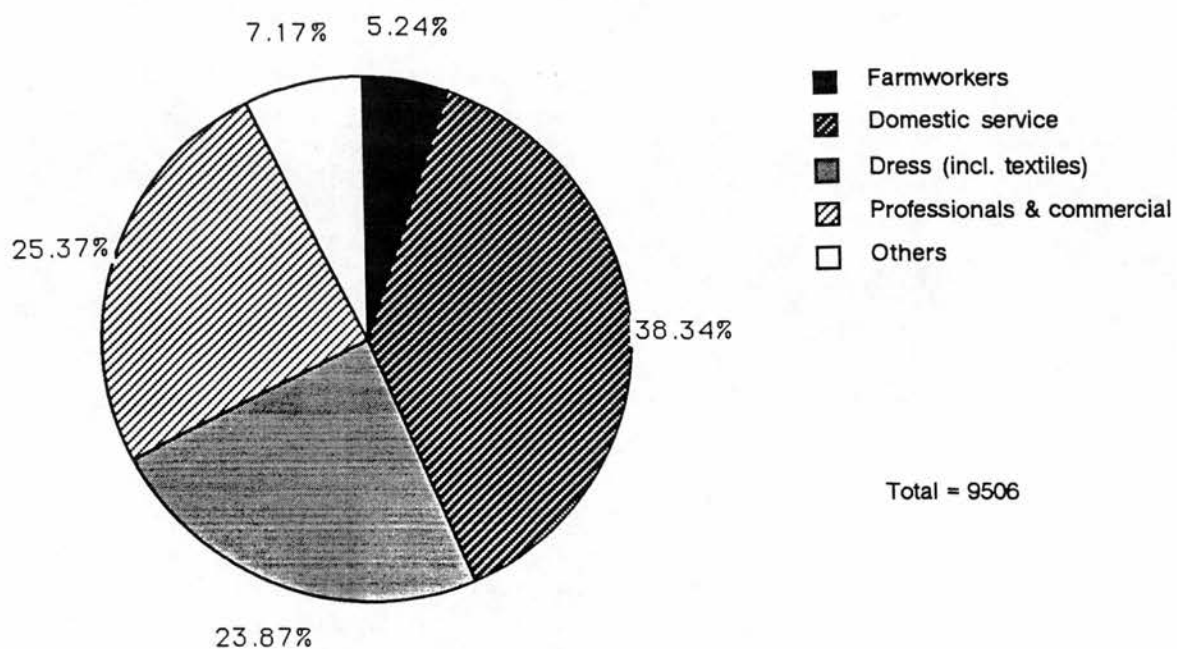
Male occupations, East Lothian, 1921



Source: See Graph 1

Graph 3

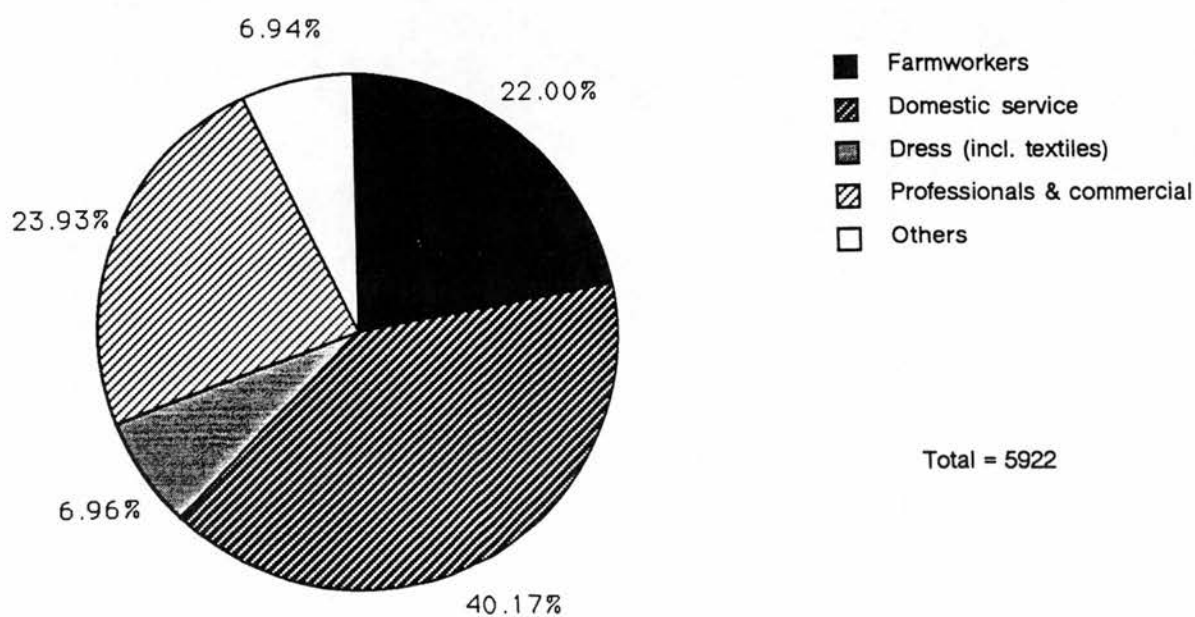
Female occupations, Dumfries, 1921



Source: see Graph 1

Graph 4

Female occupations, East Lothian, 1921



Source: see Graph 1

However, given these parameters, a number of broad trends can be identified for Dumfries and East Lothian (Graphs 3 and 4). Firstly, agriculture was a more important employer of women in East Lothian than in Dumfries, a consequence of the tendency to employ large numbers of female outworkers in the South-East generally. Secondly, both counties faced heavy competition for women workers, particularly from domestic service, which was regarded as the standard alternative to agricultural employment. In the case of East Lothian there was substantial demand from Edinburgh which had the highest concentration of domestic servants of the major Scottish cities¹. There was also a sizeable textile industry in Dumfries.

Therefore, while both the counties had significant agricultural sectors, the pattern of labour demand was different, with East Lothian retaining a large mining community in the west of the county, and being located much closer to the Central Belt which was dominated by industrial towns. Dumfries, and the South-West in general, remained a generally peripheral and more isolated region from much of Scottish economic development, and continued, as it had done throughout the nineteenth century, to rely on economic development elsewhere for the demand for its agricultural products and population surplus². This, combined with differing agricultural production structures, particularly in terms of farm size, means that influences on employment relationships, both from an economic and sociological perspective, were different enough to justify a comparative study of local employment conditions.

¹ This was constantly alluded to in the interviews of farm workers, for example both Mrs. Main and Mrs. Raeburn undertook domestic service during their occupational careers. On domestic service in Scotland see Jamieson, L., 'Rural and urban women in domestic service' in E.Gordon and E.Breitenbach (eds.), *The world is ill divided: women's work in Scotland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1990), pp.137-157.

² Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers: changes in rural society in south-west Scotland before 1914* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1991), chs.1-2.

Local history and oral history

The next three chapters incorporate oral history as a major source in the study of local labour markets. Oral history has seen a phenomenal growth in the last two decades as a medium for historical study, yet many professional historians still regard it with suspicion. The use of oral history and its importance as an historical source has been discussed at length elsewhere¹. The primary aim of this section is to identify how oral history fits in with the study of local labour markets, and to examine some of the problems in using oral evidence.

There is a danger in relying too heavily or solely on personal reminiscence for the academic study of the past. Of course, interviews with individuals who were present at particular historical events places the twentieth century historian at a tremendous advantage over those who study earlier periods; quite simply, questions can be asked on matters where there is a dearth of alternative material, for example with reference to the attitudes and behaviour of workers. Because this section specifically intends to examine in detail the attitudes and behaviour of a specific occupational group within a local labour market, it would be foolish to ignore such a valuable resource.

However, as with any other source, oral history must be placed in its subjective context. It must be regarded as just one medium through which an historian's craving to understand the past can be satisfied. There are a number of general problems with oral evidence. Firstly, an individual is being asked to recall specific memories from a distant time (fifty years in this case), and long-term memory is not entirely reliable. It is easy for events and feelings to become chronologically confused, and the long-term memory can sometimes be highly selective. For example, it was difficult to get respondents to distinguish between before and after the Second World War. Secondly, it is impossible to sample from the relevant population on a scientific basis, since many members are dead and others are geographically dispersed (the latter is a particular problem with agricultural workers since many left the land to seek other occupations, often moving to urban areas). Finally, individual reminiscence is from an individual point-of-view. This can be an advantage because it offers a variety of information

¹ Thompson, P., *The voice of the past: oral history* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978); Lummis, T., *Listening to history. The authenticity of oral evidence* (Hutchinson, London, 1987).

from different perspectives, but the historian must be fully aware of what the perspective is; a concern elucidated by the sociologist Newby:

'The best oral historians are those who use oral sources as a supplementary source of data rather than as an attempt to create a sociological portrait of a past society. If we wish to recreate a bygone age through the eyes of our informants and use this information to illustrate, support or test our own theories of society, there are grave difficulties of which I feel oral historians should be made more aware. I am referring here not just to problems of sampling or of respondents seeing things through rose-coloured spectacles. These I feel can often be dealt with by oral historians by an application of common sense. The problems I wish to deal with are of a slightly more subtle and sociological nature, but disconcerting nevertheless. They concern the perceptions by individuals of their particular social milieu and of society in general. These perceptions, their images of society, are structured in particular ways according to the social situation of the individuals holding them. In other words, the 'distortions' of reality which individuals adhere to are not the product of random psychological factors, but arise out of their own situations. The result is frequently an enormous complexity of images of society so that there is often a complete lack of coherence, not only between individuals about society, but within the kind of a single individual. The implications are obvious - if we have great difficulty in building up a coherent view of the nature of contemporary society as viewed by our informants, how much more serious are the problems when we attempt to achieve this for a society fifty or sixty years ago.'¹

Newby did not argue that oral evidence should be discounted by historians, but that the best approach was to use it in conjunction with other material. Accordingly the present research can be regarded as an historical examination which makes use of reminiscences as one of a series of sources rather than as a piece of pure 'oral history'.

Agricultural workers are an occupational group that have already received considerable attention from historians who have made extensive use of oral history². The size and composition of the oral history sample are of prime importance. The present sample consisted of 14 workers from East/Midlothian and 10 from Dumfries, with a variety of occupations (ploughman, tractorman, shepherd, fieldworker, etc.) and ages (eldest born 1898, youngest 1924). Unfortunately only three women were found, all in

¹ Newby, H., 'The dangers of reminiscence' *Local Historian*, 10 (1973), pp.334-335.

² George Ewart Evans was probably the first historian to make extensive use of individual memory in an agricultural context; his publications include, *The horse in the furrow* (Faber, London, 1960), *The pattern under the plough: aspects of the folk-life in East Anglia* (Faber, London, 1966) and *Where beards wag all: the relevance of oral tradition* (Faber, London, 1970).

East Lothian, and the result is that the attitudes of females, a sizeable proportion of the workforce, tend to be under-represented.

Both Howkins and Caunce, in their work on Norfolk and East Yorkshire, interviewed similar numbers (22 and 18 respectively). However, given their interest in the relations between employer and worker, it is surprising that neither made a deliberate effort to interview a sample of farmers¹. It is important to remember that there are two sides to an employment relationship; for example, with reference to recruitment there is a need to know what were the attitudes of employers when selecting workers. Consequently nine farmers were also interviewed (six in East Lothian, three in Dumfriesshire), again with a variety of backgrounds, in terms of size and type of farm. Specific problems did occur with the farmer informants, notably the fact that many were working under their fathers at the time, and did not take full control of the farm until after 1939. However, a number were in charge by the 1930s².

Details of all the interviewees can be found in Appendix Three. The important point to grasp is that the interviews undertaken represent a variety of personal experiences within the two counties, and therefore, taken together, can be regarded as relatively representative of the views of farmers and workers. Where oral evidence is used extensively (particularly in chapter eight on social relations), it is in conjunction with a variety of other sources and with a continuing awareness of the individual's perspective.

¹ Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*. Howkins had two farmers in his sample; Caunce spoke to a number of workers who eventually became farmers, but his prime interest was in their reminiscences as employees.

² Interview Black, Drysdale, Forrest and Maxwell.

Chapter 6: The rules of the game: reputations, recruitment and contracts

'In your issue of 7th May I advertised for a situation as a byreman, and received a few replies. As time was short, I answered the most suitable one only, in which the farmer asked for an interview. I wrote and stated when and where I would meet him, and received in reply a telegram saying he was sorry it was unsuitable to meet that day (Saturday), but that he would call on me on Monday. He did not come or send any word. I waited until Wednesday, and then wrote and asked him the cause of the delay, as I had stopped all correspondence with other two farmers on receiving his wire. He has ignored that letter, with the result that, through waiting on him, I now find myself, on 21st May, even with good references from past and present employers, without a situation. I ask you to publish this letter, in the hope that the farmer referred to may know what he has done and ask himself if he has played the game.'

Byreman, East Lothian¹

This chapter intends to focus upon the methods utilised by workers and farmers to match specific labour demand and labour supply requirements, and the nature and enforcement of subsequent contractual agreements. There are a number of reasons for instigating such a specific study; firstly, the way in which workers are matched with vacancies (job search), and the nature of agreements between employers and workers (contracts), are considered by economists to be subjects of major importance in relation to the efficient operation of labour markets²; secondly, there has been little study of these issues by economic historians, and thirdly the Scottish agricultural labour market provides a wealth of information on both worker recruitment and the nature and enforcement of employment contracts.

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 4 June 1932, p.800.

² Joll, C., McKenna, C., McNabb, R. and Shorey, J., *Developments in labour market analysis* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1983), ch.4; McKenna, C.J., 'The theory of search in labour markets' in Sapsford, D. and Tzannatos, Z. (eds.), *Current issues in labour economics* (Macmillan, London, 1990), pp.33-62; Manning, A., 'Implicit-contract theory', in *idem*, pp.63-85.

Theories of Job Search and Signalling in the Labour Market

The apparent inability of modern labour markets to adjust automatically to high levels of unemployment by forcing wages down and increasing labour demand, has led many labour economists to investigate possible reasons behind inefficiencies in the operation of labour markets. The result has been a focus on the specific methods used and factors affecting worker recruitment, notably the variables that influence worker job search behaviour and the media used by employers and employees to signal their requirements for labour demand and supply¹.

'The model of job search deals with the operation of labour markets characterised by imperfect information about job opportunities and the availability of labour. There is no central agency which can convey information about these matters and supervise the drawing up of contracts between firms and workers; the collection of information about vacancies and wage offers, and the drawing up of employment contracts, is left to individual market participants. Thus, exchange in the labour market is a costly economic activity, and the decisions about how much to spend before agreeing to an exchange is taken according to economic optimisation principles. As a result of this, the movement of labour between firms is a slow process, employment contracts may be of long duration, and their terms (in particular wage rates) may not be the same for all firms.'²

Since much of the interest has come from a desire to explain unemployment patterns, on-the-job search has not received the same level of attention as search by unemployed workers, despite common agreement that most workers find new jobs without an interrupting spell of unemployment³. Job search can be considered at two levels, the intensity (the amount of search activity undertaken within a given period) and the extensivity (the quantity of time spent on a search). The level of search undertaken by individuals is a direct function of the perceived benefits

¹ This section is based on Joll, C. et al., *Developments in labour market analysis*, ch.4; Pissarides, C.A., 'Job search and the functioning of labour markets' in D.Carline, C.A.Pissarides, W.S.Siebert and P.J.Sloane, *Labour economics* (Longman, London, 1985), pp.159-185; McKenna, C.J., 'The theory of search'.

² Pissarides, C.A., 'Job search', p.159.

³ *ibid*, pp.172-3. I am, of course, not denying that some work has been done on on-the-job search, only that it has received less attention. Examples of such work include Black, M., 'An empirical test of the theory of on-the-job-search' *Journal of Human Resources*, 16 (1981), pp.129-140; Hughes, G. and McCormick, B., 'An empirical analysis of on-the-job search and job mobility' *Manchester School of Economic & Social Studies*, 53 (1985), pp.76-95; Burgess, P.L. and Low, S.A., 'Preunemployment job search and advance job loss notice' *Journal of Labor Economics*, 10 (1992), pp.258-287.

related to the cost of searching, and when the marginal cost of search exceeds the marginal benefit then the search will be terminated¹.

Firms are active in the labour market seeking highly-productive workers, who have a set of skills which closely match those demanded by a specific occupation. Productivity is not just a function of worker characteristics, it is also a result of the quality and effectiveness of job match that the market provides. As McKenna has concluded, 'putting the right workers in the right job is a central allocative role for any labour market'². Both workers and firms therefore seek information on the attributes of each other, in order to match up their characteristics, and this is called 'signalling and screening'. If the costs of one side for signalling information are low, then more screening information will be available to the other; and because the process is simultaneous (i.e. worker and employer engage in signalling and screening at the same time), the benefits both sides derive from screening and signalling depend upon each side's cost of communicating information³.

However, this does not mean that, if the market was working efficiently, the wage offered by all firms for a particular job should be the same, because the cost of screening and signalling varies across firms. In any case, the provision of information is never perfect, and this further exacerbates the distribution of wages that workers face.

'Under competitive conditions, wage offers to high quality people will be bid up, particularly by those firms which value high quality labour most. If there are sufficient numbers of firms requiring labour of each quality, competition will eventually mean that wage offers will approach the marginal revenue product *at each quality level*. Hence, assuming each firm requires a particular quality as well as particular skills, each firm will be offering one of a range of wages for each skill that it employs and firms with relatively low prospecting costs will be able to afford high quality labour. This therefore explains in large part why in their search activities workers face a distribution of wages, not a single wage, and why certain firms will be high wage, high quality labour employers. However, given that workers do not have perfect information on where high quality, high wage firms are, and given that firms do not have perfect information on which workers are of high quality, there will also be a distribution of wages at each quality level.'⁴

The actual conditions existing in the Scottish agricultural labour market prior to 1939 bear little resemblance to the mechanisms of labour market

¹ McKenna, C.J., 'The theory of search', p.34.

² *Ibid*, p.58.

³ Joll, C. et al., *Developments in labour market analysis*, pp.95-96.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.93.

operation today, as for example, the system of fixed long-term contracts with recruitment at specific times of the year, the extensive provision of tied housing, and the absence of unemployment benefits. Therefore the empirical findings of many studies that have utilised theories of job search, and screening and signalling, are inapplicable. Nevertheless, what these theories do offer is a structural basis from which the microeconomic mechanisms of recruitment in Scottish farming can be analysed, in particular their emphasis on the provision of information, and the resulting costs and benefits to workers and employers. It will be argued that the general low cost of signalling and screening for both sides in Scottish agriculture, especially the very low costs for the worker to undertake on-the-job search, meant that the market was relatively efficient at matching employer and worker requirements. In addition, the specific institutionalisation of job search, combined with its low costs, encouraged high rates of worker mobility¹.

A Theory of Contracts

During the 1980s labour economists became interested in the existence of so-called 'implicit contracts'². Proponents of implicit contract theory argue that a long-term conditional contract results from the fact that employers are less risk-averse in their labour market behaviour than workers, and therefore employers offer workers guaranteed conditions (wages and/or employment) to offset fluctuations in the workers' marginal revenue product (the return that the employer obtains from each input of labour). The worker and the employer therefore agree to a long-term advance contract that binds both parties to certain conditions. However, such labour contracts are by their nature complex, and rarely observed explicitly in the real world (i.e. they are not written down), therefore the agreement is *implicit*, hence the name 'implicit contract'.

A serious problem affects implicit contracts; if, after an implicit contract is made, the economic opportunities for the employer and the worker change unexpectedly, there will be a strong incentive for one side to break the

¹ Worker mobility is examined in detail in chapter 7.

² For the details of implicit contract theory see, Rosen, A., 'Implicit contracts: a survey' *Journal of Economic Literature*, 23 (1985), pp.1144-1175; Azariadis, C., 'Implicit contracts' in Eatwell, J., Milgate, M. and Newman, P. (eds.), *The New Palgrave: allocation, information and markets* (Macmillan, London, 1989), pp.132-140; Manning, A., 'Implicit-contract theory'.

contract and seek a better deal elsewhere. For example, a new major employer could move into the local area, offering substantially higher wages for similar work, or the market for the product produced by the employer may collapse and the payment of a guaranteed wage become loss-making. Because the conditions are implicit, then it is difficult to enforce such contracts through the use of law (the courts); therefore, the successful operation of implicit contracts relies on the desire for both parties not to break them.

One suggested method for the enforcement of implicit contracts has been the importance of 'reputations'¹. The economic logic is that, if an employer or worker breaks the implicit conditions of a contract, then the individual concerned will gain a 'reputation' for failing to keep his/her word. This could, for example, be through the employer's increasing the intensity of work or failing to supply the worker with non-pecuniary rewards, or the worker shirking and reducing productivity. A major problem in this argument is the supply of information concerning the behaviour of individuals, which economists believe tends to disseminate slowly and with varying degrees of accuracy². Because there are fewer employers than workers in the market, information (and therefore reputation) concerning the former is believed to be more widely available.

'Implicit contract theory can be regarded as a formulation of the "long-run" demand for labour by "reputable" employers in a changing environment characterized by an uncertain future. These are firms that expect to be in business indefinitely and consequently recognize the need to attract workers both now and in the future. Under these conditions, each has an incentive to establish and maintain "labor policies" that both current and prospective employees can depend on even in the face of changing future circumstances....the...general point is that the exchange in the labor market is not simply a trade of labor services for a money wage at a point in time. Instead the labor market promotes the formation of viable employee-employer relationships that are expected to last for some period of time as a consequence of embodied specific capital at the time.'³

¹ For examples of implicit contract models relying on reputations see Holmstrom, B., 'Contractual models of the labor market' *American Economic Review. Papers and Proceedings*, 71 (1981), pp.308-313; Carmichael, H.L., 'Reputations in the labor market' *American Economic Review*, 74 (1984), pp.713-725; Bull, C., 'The existence of self-enforcing implicit contracts' *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 102 (1987), pp.147-159.

² Bull, C., 'The existence of self-enforcing implicit contracts', pp.148-149.

³ Mortensen, D.T., 'Job search and labor market analysis' in O.Ashenfelter and R.Layard (eds.), *Handbook of labor economics, II* (North-Holland, Amsterdam, 1986), p.914.

Actually identifying the existence of implicit contracts in real world situations has proved difficult¹, partly because by their very nature they are not explicitly visible. Also, as already noted, enforcing such contracts is not easy, given the erratic nature of information flows in the labour market. Recently Otsuka et al., in their detailed examination of land and labour contracts in agrarian societies, have concluded that, because rural communities' information networks often operate within a limited geographical area, and the composition of such communities tends to be stable, then implicit contracts can be successfully enforced. This is facilitated by the rapid and reliable flow of information on individual contractual behaviour.

'Reputation plays a central role in recent microeconomic theories....The key role is that the evolution of one's actions and reputation, thus formed, affects one's future economic opportunities, because other agents consider one's reputation when they decide their own strategies. In other words, each agent needs to evaluate the effects of his current actions on his reputational capital in any period.

In long term principal agent models, the agent is less inclined to shirk because he must take into account the effect of his action not only on his current earnings but also on his subsequent earnings. Even if the contract length is short, if failure to take the actions prescribed by the contract results in a loss of reputation that causes such a reduction in welfare as to deter offenders, the contract becomes effectively enforceable.

In order for reputation to be an effective enforcer, information about contract violations must be efficiently transmitted to workers outside a firm seeking jobs as well as to current employees. In agrarian economies a farm population...is usually long settled in a village community and people know one another quite well through an efficient mouth-to-mouth communication network. In such a circumstance, reputation certainly matters, because, contract violators will soon become known in the community.'²

Throughout this chapter, it will be argued that employers and workers, active in the Scottish agricultural labour market, practised a mixture of explicit and implicit contract arrangements, and that these contracts were successfully enforced through the requirement to maintain satisfactory reputations. Further evidence on the importance of reputations is presented in chapter seven, where variations in worker-specific and farm-specific mobility rates are linked to the known reputations of farm servants, farmers and farms.

¹ Bleaney, M., 'Why is evidence for implicit contracts in the labour market so scarce' *Australian Economic Papers*, 30 (1991), pp.21-27.

² Otsuka, K., Chuma, H. and Hayami, Y., 'Land and labor contracts in agrarian economies: theories and facts' *Journal of Economic Literature*, 30 (1992), pp.1991-1992.

CONTRACTS

Conditions

As noted in chapter 3, full-time Scottish farm workers were hired on long-term contracts, lasting six months or a year. However, there were significant regional variations in the contractual conditions, and the focus here will be on conditions that existed in Dumfriesshire and East Lothian¹.

By the early twentieth century, agricultural workers in northern England, Scotland and Wales were one of the few occupational groups still attached to fixed-term engagements, conditions very much associated with the concept of 'master and servant'. The fixed-term was a well-established, explicit part of the contract, rarely was the length of term disputed², and all the workers who were interviewed were hired under such conditions.

In East Lothian the length of contract was twelve months for all regular workers, with the termination day being 28th May for all contracts. In Dumfriesshire the situation was more complex. Printed sources claim that married workers were hired for a year, and unmarried workers for six months³; however, the interviews demonstrate that many single workers were hired with their parents on annual contracts, and only where single workers were hired separately was the six-month term in use:

*'Were single workers always hired separately from their parents? No, not always. Sometimes a father and son would be hired together, the father would be ploughman, and the boy would do orra work. Sometimes the farmer was quite pleased if he engaged a ploughman and he had a son...it solved some of the other labour problems.'*⁴

As with East Lothian, the main term date was 28th May, but for single workers on the shorter six-month contract it also occurred on 28th November.

¹ For a general survey of contractual conditions see chapter 3.

² I have found evidence in two cases where the term of the contract was disputed; i) a worker successfully sued a farmer for wages owed following his dismissal, the farmer claimed that the worker was hired on a weekly basis (*Scottish Farmer*, 22 January 1927, p.103); and ii) another successful worker case over a hiring made at Carlisle by a Dumfries farmer, where the worker assumed he was hired on an English term - 11th November - rather than a Scottish one - 28th November (*Scottish Farmer*, 24 March 1906, p.238).

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt. I, pp.96-97; *Report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban* (P.P.1917-18, XIV, Cd.8731), p.162.

⁴ Interview McIntyre, also Jardine and Sykes.

The domination of the twelve month contract in East Lothian was the result of 'family hiring', a practice whereby all members of the family were engaged on one contract to a single farmer¹. Where father and son worked together as ploughmen this was known as a 'double-hinding', and for shepherds a 'double-herding'. Wives and daughters were often hired out, a continuation of the 'bondager' system where male workers had been required to supply a female outworker. During the nineteenth century, this meant that single females hired themselves out to unrelated male workers, so that the male worker could obtain an employment contract. Moral attacks on the system had led to its abandonment during the 1860s-70s, although workers continued to supply female labour from their own families². Contemporary reports from the interwar period suggest that women were increasingly hiring on separate contracts from their parents in the Lothians³; however, while women were sometimes technically being paid and hired as individuals, in practice they remained as part of the family labour unit because they continued to live in the same tied cottage as their parents. The proximity of a tied cottage to a specific farm meant that this was the obvious choice for employment, and when a man changed jobs, his wife and/or daughter(s) and sons would be forced to follow⁴. One fact remained clear, farmers continued to hire workers on the explicit basis that they would provide the labour of the rest of their family, the benefit for the farmer being that he obtained more than one worker out of each tied cottage; and since the supply of cottages on any one farm was limited, farmers were forced into such a requirement.

'In these days they liked a big family, see when we went there [to Highfield], there was my father, and four boys working, so that was five workers out of one house. Well, when they gradually went away, they [the farmer] were going to have this house with only one man, so they wanted him to move

¹ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt. II, pp.96 and 100.

² Dunbabin, J.P.D., *Rural discontent in nineteenth-century Britain* (Faber & Faber, London, 1974), ch.6; Devine, T.M., 'Women workers, 1850-1914' in *idem* (ed.), *Farm servants and labour in lowland Scotland, 1770-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1984), pp.105-106; Robertson, B.W., 'In bondage: the female farm worker in south-east Scotland' in E.Gordon and E.Breitenbach (eds.), *The world is ill divided: women's work in Scotland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1990), pp.117-135.

³ BOAS, *Report of the Committee on women in agriculture in Scotland* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1920), pp.13-14.

⁴ In some cases sons and daughters were recruited onto neighbouring farms, but such contracts were heavily influenced by the decision of the head of household (Interview Main).

into a smaller house. He said he wouldnae move into a smaller house, so he just moved into Rockville [farm]....They liked big families.¹

'...women workers were very much needed because they were a lot on the farm....if you had a couple of women and the farmer needed these women, he would have given him [the male worker] a shilling or two a week more, to come and get him.'²

As the last quote makes quite clear, the initiative for family hiring remained with the male head of household.

Dumfriesshire farmers also hired family labour. However, because of their smaller average size of holding, and the greater reliance on livestock production where labour inputs were smaller, their demand for labour, particularly female outworkers, was much lower. The exception was in dairy production, which required high labour inputs during the twice-daily milking, and the resulting contractual basis for dairymen was different. They were often paid a fixed sum according to the size of the herd, and from this wage were expected to supply all the necessary labour.

'Take a dairyman, he [the farmer] didnae hire the dairyman, he hired the family....that was his wife, his daughter and probably a son. It was a family he engaged to do his dairy. It wasnae just the dairyman....It took quite a bit of milking. There would be, for instance, two ploughmen's wives, the dairyman, his wife, and a daughter, all milking in the morning and at night.'³

Dairymen had their annual contract term date on 28th November, coinciding with a seasonal termination in milk production before the cows calved⁴.

The actual conditions of work were never explicitly outlined during negotiations, and much was governed by custom, a practice that was common amongst farm service in other areas of Britain⁵. The contracts were predominantly oral, and the few written contracts that were obtained rarely specified more than the wage and the termination date. Therefore a whole

¹ Interview Leckie.

² Interview Denholm.

³ Interview Hunter; see also Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers: changes in rural society in south-west Scotland before 1914* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1991), p.91.

⁴ Interview McIntyre and Hastings; *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.96.

⁵ Dunbabin, J.P.D., *Rural discontent in nineteenth-century Britain*, p.133; Carter, I., *Farm life in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), pp.112-5; Counce, S., *Amongst farm horses: the horselads of East Yorkshire* (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991), p.40. Custom continues to be an important factor in the definition of manual labour; Marsden, D., *The end of economic man? Custom and competition in labour markets* (Wheatsheaf, Brighton, 1986), p.134.

range of employment conditions were governed by 'implicit', informal agreements, that worker and farmer assumed were automatically part of a labour agreement. These not only included hours, holidays, sick pay, and occupational and hierarchical divisions of labour, but also, in the case of the Scottish farm servant, housing and family employment¹. However, the implicit part of the contract was a consequence of subjective socially-constructed norms, and would therefore have to change as society adjusted its 'acceptable' perception of these norms. Two examples will be examined, the payment of wages during worker illness, and the provision of 'adequate' tied housing.

During the 1890s, in the Lothians, wages were paid in full during times of worker sickness.

'There is no lost time to male labourer or farm servants engaged by the year in the Lothians. Their pay goes on without interruption, holiday or no holiday, sick or well. Several cases were quoted to me when men had been off work through sickness, for periods extending from four to eight weeks, and still their wages were paid up regularly every fortnight or month, according to the custom of the farm. In one case a hind [married ploughman] was confined to the house for three months without being deprived of any wages.'²

When National Health Insurance was introduced in 1911, it was made clear that the payment of benefits did not preclude the employer from any legal liability of paying wages during sickness. Nevertheless, the Scottish Farm Servants' Union identified sick pay as a custom that varied widely across Scotland, and the enforcement of an obligation to pay wages during sickness depended on the establishment of this condition as a part of the local customary contract³. By the post First World War period the situation was becoming more and more unclear, many farmers stopped paying wages during sickness, as sick pay became an established state-administered function.

¹ *Royal Commission on unemployment insurance. Evidence* (HMSO, London, 1931), p.1080, J.F.Duncan.

² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.111, Report on East and Midlothian. However women, who were paid by the hour or day for fieldwork, were not paid if they were off; see also BOAS, *Report of the Committee on women*, p.109.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1913, p.5.

'Whether or not wages should be paid during sickness depends entirely on the conditions of engagement or the custom of the district....Some employers agree to pay wages for the first three days of sickness only; some agree to pay half wages during sickness; some agree to pay wages, less the amount of sickness benefit received from the State Insurance; some agree to pay full wages for six weeks; and some agree not to pay any wages during sickness. In most counties the conditions vary from farm to farm, and there is no well established custom....The conditions vary so much that it will become increasingly difficult in future to prove any custom to [legally] pay wages during sickness...'¹

The interviewees, both farmers and workers, confirm a very confused picture. About a quarter claimed that the workers continued to receive their wages during sickness with no conditions attached, most either gave their insurance benefit to the farmer and got their wages, or were paid for the first three days after which they received national insurance payments.

'Did you get paid your wages while you were sick?

You got it off the insurance. Some farmers would pay you, and some of them just paid you maybe two or three days, after which you just got your insurance money, which wasn't very much in these days. When I came to Highfield, you never lost your pay at Highfield, supposing you were off six months you still got your pay. You had to hand over your insurance money to them.'²

Therefore, this part of the 'implicit' contract was in a continual state of flux, both in terms of custom and legality. The growing assumption that the state should provide for the remuneration of the workforce during illness, exerted a strong influence over the expectations of workers and the actions of farmers.

A more consistent part of the implicit contract was the provision of tied housing, and, in the case of single workers boarded separately on farms in Dumfriesshire, meals received in the farm kitchen. Nearly all Scottish farm workers were accommodated in tied housing; in East Lothian this meant cottages attached to the farm, and in Dumfriesshire cottages for families and bothies contained in the farm steading for single workers. Implicit in the employment contract was that food and housing would 'adequately' meet the physical needs of the worker (and family). The 1917 Report of the Royal

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, January 1919, p.247-248. See also NFUS, Central Executive Committee minutes, 30 January 1919, p.9.

² Interview Leckie.

Commission on Housing in Scotland reported a wide variety of housing conditions for farm workers, and clearly identified the employment contract as major issue in the provision of suitable housing¹. However, such judgements were clearly subjective on contemporary expectations of exactly what 'adequate' housing was.

'...the man makes his engagement generally in the market-place, and does not see the house he is to occupy until after the engagement is concluded. He has to rely on the farmer's assurance that the house is suitable, or to trust to hearsay from other sources as to the condition of the house. Frequently a man does not have the opportunity of seeing the house until he goes to it with his furniture on the term day....An instance is given where a man with a large family particularly asked as to the accommodation, and was told by his new employer that he would find it quite sufficient. On arrival he found a "but" and "ben," in which it was quite impossible for him to house his family in decency. He there and then refused to ratify his engagement. He was taken to the Sheriff Court and fined 50s. for breach of contract, although his employer had distinctly contracted to give him the sufficiency of accommodation that he had demanded.'²

Interviews with retired workers confirm how important a part housing was of the employment contract. Farm workers often tried to see the house before hiring, especially with the demise of the hiring fairs which had automatically prevented them from inspecting it before an agreement was made. In any case, once they had hired, most workers went to their new homes a few weeks before the term day to plant a crop of potatoes in the garden, and this gave them an opportunity to see the house.³ Some workers refused employment if the houses were not suitable.

'There were two things being hired to a farmer - a good house, that satisfied the wife - and a reasonable job. If the house wasn't suiting the wife, well you may as well pack it in.'⁴

Similarly, the state of food provided for single workers in Dumfriesshire when they lived in bothies, was an important part of the contract.

¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on housing*, pp.161-162 and 169-170.

² *ibid*, pp.169-170; see also *Royal commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban. Evidence* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.1406, J.Paxton, griever, Midlothian.

³ Interview Sykes, Heard, Lawrie, Foggo, Smart, Leckie, Trotter, Porteus, Raeburn, Waite, Hunter, Bell. Farm workers hired about 2-3 months before the changeover of contracts in May and November (see below).

⁴ Interview Lawrie. Mrs Main also cited a case when her father specifically refused employment on a farm after he had seen the state of the houses.

'Did some farms have reputations for providing poor food?

Oh, aye. These are farms, they were always hunting for workers....If you got a good place, a good house and a good job, and you got on with your farmer and that, they'll [the workers] stay for ages. That's what they want, everybody wanted that.'¹

Yet the state of housing was rarely given as a reason for a legal challenge to a labour contract, and this once again emphasises the implicit nature of such informal contract conditions, where official contractual enforcement was virtually impossible². The list of implicit conditions within the farm servant's contract could be endless, since little was explicitly and legally specified - the hours of work, the provisions of days off, the expectation of a family to supply casual labour on demand, the occupational division of labour (i.e. what sort of work a servant was expected to undertake), the provision of working materials (particularly the state of horse and harnesses) - all were unspecified in an agreement, yet both farmer and worker would have set expectations. In legal terms, establishing and enforcing the implicit conditions of a contract proved very uncertain.

'The first duty of the servant is to obey those orders which the master is justified in giving under the terms of the agreement; all orders concerning work which the servant is to do and the time, manner, and place of performing it are presumably, and in the absence of special circumstances, within the control of the master. What orders a master is entitled to give will ultimately depend upon the terms of the contract of service, or, in default, on its character and the position of the parties, and it maybe a nice question how far a servant employed in one capacity may be properly called upon by the master to perform work not appertaining to that capacity....It will be a question of fact...to say whether the order was one which the servant was bound to obey.'³

Enforcement

It has been established that Scottish farm worker contracts had both explicit and implicit conditions attached to them. Enforcing such contracts, however,

¹ Interview Barber. Similar attitudes have been shown for the North-East and East Yorkshire, Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, ch.5; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, ch.12.

² The only case I could find concerned a Perthshire worker, who successfully sued for damages to the health of his family resulting from bad housing conditions, *Scottish Farmer*, 13 May 1916, pp.400-401.

³ Batt, F.R., *The law of master and servant* (Pitman & Sons, London, 1933), pp.139-140.

was not easy, given their heavy reliance on established custom (which was itself a changeable fact) and the lack of written evidence concerning the details of each individual contract. Bargaining by word-of-mouth was convenient, but, if the situation of mutual trust broke down, what was to prevent either the farmer or the worker from immediately terminating the contract and seeking another situation? Both sides complained that their ability to seek legal redress was limited.

'...the masters in some counties complain very seriously of servants engaged for a certain date failing to appear, or deserting service immediately after arrival. The present state of the law renders redress in the court practically useless, and the servants knowing this act accordingly. Some are, however, of opinion that if they return the "arles" or "earnest money" all is well; while others restore neither arles nor service....With myself the men usually admitted the action was improper; but on one occasion they alleged it was their only defence against cruel masters. The greatest offenders are the women, then the single men.'¹

'In the majority of cases no dispute arises, but the Union has come across a great many members who allege they have a grievance, because the farmer has not kept to his bargain in some particular. Examples are, (1) A cattleman was assured on engaging that he would not have more than a certain number of cattle to attend to. A few months afterwards, the farmer purchased more cattle, thus throwing a considerable amount of additional work on the cattleman. The cattle man refused to do the work and was dismissed. (2) A farm servant was dismissed because he refused to do barn work, he alleging that in terms of his bargain he was exempt from such work. (3) A cottar [worker occupying a cottage] was promised certain improvements to his dwelling house when he was engaged. The farmer afterwards denied the promise.

In all these cases, and in other similar cases, the Union has been compelled to advise the servant that he has no redress. The burden of proving such special conditions lies upon the party who relies upon the condition, and, of course, in none of the cases could witnesses be produced, and there was no written memorandum of the agreement.'²

Despite these misgivings, the most explicit method of enforcing a contract was through the local Sheriff Court. Scottish agricultural employment contracts were governed by the law of master and servant, specifically the 1875 Employers and Workmen Act³. An analysis of all the court cases

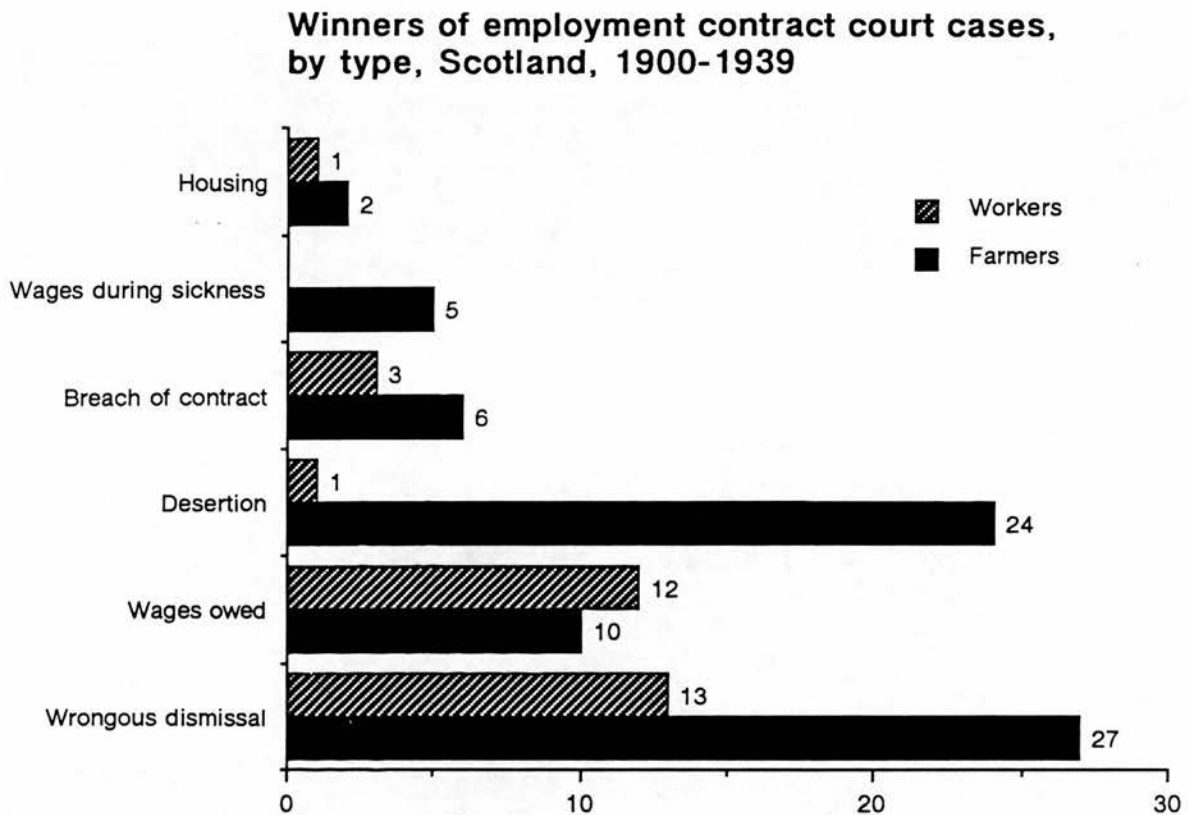
¹ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.I, p.16.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1913, p.14.

³ This section on the legal enforcement of contracts relies heavily on Batt, F.R, *The law of master and servant*; and Wark, J.L. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the laws of Scotland*, Vols. VII and IX (W.Green & Son, Edinburgh, 1929-30). For the legal position prior to the 1870s see

relating to employment contracts reported in the *Scottish Farmer* over the period 1900-39 is given in Graph 1.

Graph 1



Source: *Scottish Farmer*, 1900-39

Of the 104 cases, the majority, 68, were brought by workers, and this refutes the claim by Carter that workers refrained from taking their employers to court¹. The main cause of complaint was 'wrongous' or 'unjustifiable' dismissal, i.e. the employer dismissing the worker without adequate reason before the end of the fixed-term contract.

Houston, G., 'Labour relations in Scottish agriculture before 1870' *Agricultural History Review*, 6 (1958), pp.31-34.

¹ Carter, I., *Farm life in northeast Scotland*, p.214 fn.26. Miller claims that in nineteenth-century Gloucestershire farm servants had no legal redress if they were arbitrarily dismissed; Miller, C., 'Master and man: farmers and employees in nineteenth-century Gloucestershire' in B.Stapleton (ed.), *Conflict and community on southern England: essays in the social history of rural and urban labour from medieval to modern times* (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1992), p.206.

'Summary Dismissal.

This can be exercised when the servant has failed substantially to carry out the obligations which the service involved, and it must be remembered that a master may justify a dismissal, otherwise wrongful, by proof of conduct justifying dismissal without notice, although he had no knowledge of such conduct at the time of the dismissal; in other words, the right to dismiss does not depend upon the master's knowledge or ignorance, but on the conduct of the servant....a master may dismiss without notice for disobedience, for laziness or neglect, and for acts of misfeasance inconsistent with the due performance of duties, such as drunkenness or immorality or rudeness.¹

The exact definition of wrongful dismissal was to be interpreted by the individual circumstances of each case, and therefore rested heavily on the views of the presiding sheriff². The onus of proof was on the farmer to establish that the servant's behaviour warranted unfair dismissal; however, the judgement of the quality of work rested with the employer, and the employer did not have to specify the reasons for dismissal at the time. In addition, the employer could withhold any wages owed to the servant for failing to complete the contract.

Workers also tended to sue employers for non-payment of wages, where farmers had not fully reimbursed them for work undertaken; and in general, servants were more successful in obtaining redress on this point of the contract. On the other hand, it often proved quite easy for farmers to establish that workers had failed to adequately perform their work, and therefore wrongful dismissal cases tended to be unsuccessful. The forfeiture of wages already earned was a particularly oppressive employer right, and by the 1930s a more liberal interpretation of the law was being undertaken whereby the Court could decide whether the gravity of the fault was serious enough to allow the employer to withhold all the wages owed³.

Employers primarily went to court on the basis of servant desertion, i.e. workers failing to complete their contracts either by not turning up at the beginning of the term, or by quitting the farm in the middle of the contract.

'An action for damages always lies where a servant breaks his contract by leaving without notice or fails to perform the obligations of service imposed upon him....In such cases the damages are assessed on the ordinary basis and the master recovers the actual loss sustained by the servant's wrongful

¹ Batt, F.R., *The law of master and servant*, p.171.

² *ibid*, p.186.

³ Wark, J.L., *Encyclopedia of the laws of Scotland*, Vol.VII, p.608; also see *Scottish Farmer*, 4 March 1933, p.277, 'Campbeltown master and servant case'.

act, that is to say, the master is entitled to recover such sum as will place him in the same pecuniary position as if the servant had fulfilled the contract.¹

This meant that the farmer could sue for the cost of having to find a replacement to fulfil the contract, and for the fact that working capital (horses, machinery, dairy cows) would stand idle as a result of desertion. The returning of arles by the worker, as a method of invalidating an agreed engagement, was technically illegal, meaning that it was impossible for a servant under normal circumstances to avoid completing the contract². If a worker deserted his employment then the court was almost certainly find in favour of the farmer (see Graph 1), a fact that created continual problems for the SFSU when called upon to provide legal assistance to its members³. Success was more likely when a worker refused to undertake part of his contract, for example refusing to work on Saturday afternoons, where he would potentially be in 'breach of contract'.⁴

As noted earlier, the majority of recorded court cases were prosecuted by workers, yet their success rate in all cases stood at only 29%, suggesting that the courts were biased towards the employer⁵. However, it was not a complete whitewash, and workers could successfully gain recompense for farmers' breaches of contract on some occasions⁶. The SFSU believed that the problem was as much the fault of the law itself as of the judicial system, a fact clearly demonstrated when farmers sued each other for 'harbouring a deserter'. When a servant failed to fulfil his employment contract and went to work for another farmer, the previous employer could sue this farmer for damages, a practice that the SFSU described as 'anachronistic and inconsistent with the general relations of master and servant at the present day.'⁷

¹ Batt, F.R., *The law of master and servant*, p.174.

² Wark, J.L., *Encyclopedia of the laws of Scotland*, Vol.VII, p.603; see also *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1922, p.539.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1918, p.179; January 1925, p.148.

⁴ *ibid*, April 1920, p.3

⁵ The law agent of the SFSU complained of the 'practical impossibility of getting the Sheriffs in Scotland...to administer the law without importing class bias' (SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 8 March 1920).

⁶ Caunce comes to a similar conclusion for farm servants in East Yorkshire; Caunce, S., 'Twentieth-century farm servants: the horselads of the East Riding of Yorkshire' *Agricultural History Review*, 39 (1991), p.152. Miller argues that the hiring contract was completely one-sided in favour of the farmers; Miller, C., 'Master and man', p.206.

⁷ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1921, p.17; also January 1915, p.4; June 1925, p.36.

However, the question remains as to how many disputes over employment contracts actually came to court. It is difficult to establish how accurate the coverage of the *Scottish Farmer* was. In the case of Dumfriesshire and East Lothian, there is little indication that the courts were commonly reverted to; the index of the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* mentioned only three cases concerning employment law for farm workers in the period 1900-20. Of the thirty-one interviewees, only one was ever involved in a legal case, an East Lothian farmer who was unsuccessfully taken to court by the SFSU.

'I had some trouble after I went up to Balgone Barns. There were two men, a cattleman and an orraman, that was [in] the two houses. And, I don't know what he [the orraman] did, but the cattleman said - "If you're keeping that man I'm going". Well, the cattleman was better than that man, he was a greenhorn. Joe Duncan, secretary of the Ploughman's Union took me to court, because I had told that man [the orraman] to go to another house at Carperstain.'¹

The understanding of the workers and farmers of their legal position was uncertain; some felt that the farmers were relatively powerless to prevent servant desertion.

'I've heard stories about workers hiring, and then not turning up on the term day. Is this true?

Oh yes. They had to let them ken they werenae coming. That was done gae often, folk was going places but they didn't want [to] because they'd heard that many stories about it.

Could the farmers do anything about that?

No, they never did anything about it.'²

Others were clearly aware that if a worker was legally dismissed or deserted his contract, then some or all of the wages were forfeit³. The issue of harbouring a deserter was also mentioned.

'Oh, the farmers would take a man to the court. If a man had left them and broken his bargain, he would be taken to the court. You see, if you took the arles...that was you bound, it was legal. And if you broke your bargain, left throughout the year, they could stop you from getting another place....If you wouldnae go back they couldnae make you go back, but at the same time if they'd taken you to court you were in the wrong.'⁴

¹ Interview Forrest.

² Interview Lawrie, also Bell and Drysdale.

³ Interview Raeburn, Scott, Saunders, Maxwell (worker).

⁴ Interview Trotter.

The general lack of consistent understanding on the legal position of a contract suggests that this was not the main method of enforcement, and the farmers who were interviewed rarely mentioned it as a method of ensuring worker compliance¹.

There remained a much more convenient, cheaper and effective method of contract enforcement - reputation. Most recruitment took place within the local area, and this meant that both workers and farmers were easily able to obtain information about each other. Those who were failing to fulfil the conditions of a contract, whether explicit or implicit, found that information was soon spread throughout the labour market; and would prejudice their ability to hire or be hired in the future.

'Do you think the farmers had a good idea of what the workers were like?
Aye, a lot of them knew. If you've a good character it used to spread, and if you had a bad yen it used to spread. The story about the young chap at the hiring, this old farmer asked him who he was with. "Well", he [the farmer] says, "I'll go and see your previous employer, and find out your character." So he [the farmer] sees him [the worker] later on and he says, "I've saw your old boss, and I think I'll just hire you." "Ah", he [the worker] says, "I've been hearing about your character too, and I don't think I'll come."
So the workers had a good idea of what the farmers were like?
Aye, it spread too - "Dinnae go to that man, he's a slave-driver".²

One farmer who was interviewed clearly broke the implicit contract, by tricking a worker into getting himself sacked, the result was a bad reputation and problems in future recruitment.

[A cattleman] "What about all the hours that I have worked, at the cattle late at night? I wanting on by the hour."
"Oh well", I says, "I'll see you on Monday." Well I gave the grieve all the orders and I says, "tell your brother [the cattleman] to come out to me."
"Your wanting on by the hour?"
"Aye, but what will you pay me?" Well it was [calculated at] two and a half pence.

¹ Caunce discovered similar attitudes in East Yorkshire; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, pp.35-36.

² Interview Leckie. The same story about the worker refusing to hire was also told to me by Mr. Trotter. In addition it has been recorded for other parts of Scotland and northern England; Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, p.147; Catt, J., *Northern hiring fairs* (Countryside Publications, Chorley, 1986), p.30; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, pp.66-67; Adams, D.G., *Bothy nights and days: farm bothy life in Angus and the Mearns* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1991), p.47.

"Well", I says, "I'll give you a shilling an hour."
 "Oh aye, alright." He was just going out of the stable, I says, "Come here. Count up all the hours that you have worked overtime at night."
 I says, "There", and paid him. And he was standing, turning to go out of the stable.
 I says, "Come here. There's another shilling in lieu of notice. I'll not require anymore hours from you." Sacked him on the spot.'
 'Me sacking that man with a shilling, it gave me a bad name.
It made it more difficult for you to get workers?
 Aye.'¹

Both the workers and the farmers who were interviewed confirmed the importance of a reputation in the labour market. News about particular workers and farmers who deviated from the established norms, spread rapidly. The result was, as one worker put it, 'the bad boss and the bad worker mostly was together, because he couldn't get a good man, and the poor worker couldn't get a good place.'² The effective operation of such a system ensured that there was a cost to breaking the explicit and implicit conditions of the fixed-term contracts, and also kept many employment disputes out of the courts.

"Complaints Re. Breach of Contract by Farm Workers

The Secretary stated that three cases had been reported to him in which persons engaged by Farmers at the Glasgow Hiring Market had not turned up at the appointed place [of employment], nor had they returned the Arles or the Railway Fare advanced to them. Letters sent to the employees concerned had been returned through the Post Office marked "Gone; No Address." In two cases the employer has finally stated that he did not wish his name disclosed in case it might *prejudice him at future Markets*.³ (my italics)

¹ Interview Forrest. Mr. Forrest's reputation as a difficult employer was confirmed by another farmer who knew him (Mr. Wright) and a worker who had been employed by him (Mr. Leckie). See also Jamieson, L. and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns: growing up 1900-1930* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992), p.139, for similar oral history evidence.

² Interview Sykes.

³ NFUS, President's Committee minutes, 16 June 1927.

RECRUITMENT

Hiring Fairs

Hiring fairs have attracted considerable historical interest, given their long history and seemingly 'anachronistic' existence during the early part of the twentieth century¹. Most of the research has concentrated on the north of England, where the fairs continued until the inter-war period, although they were also common in Wales and Ireland². The hiring fair is now recognised as a complex institution for the recruitment of farm labour, which combined the mechanism of individual bargaining with a collective identity for both workers and farmers.

'There was no place for hole-and-corner dealing at the fairs and no possibility of playing people off against each other. Both sides, even though composed of individuals acting for themselves, drew great solidarity from the presence of their friends, neighbours and relatives. For all that has been said and written about hiring fairs, they seem to have served the lads [workers] well both socially and economically. They remained the lynch-pin of the [farm service] system until very near the end.... They were also an epitome of the whole system, with far more functions than they have been credited with in the past. A fair was a subtle combination of a labour exchange, a collective bargaining venue, a release mechanism for social tensions both of a personal nature and those arising from the power structure of the farms, a gathering where family and friendship ties were reinforced after months of isolation, and a chance to purchase all the basic necessities for another year on the farm. If the subtlety was well masked by the proceedings uproarious nature, its existence should not be denied.'³

Hiring fairs, or 'feeing markets', have received some attention in Scottish historical literature, though this is limited and there have been no specific

¹ Kussmaul, A., *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981), ch.4; Catt, J., *Northern hiring fairs*; Roberts, M., "Waiting upon chance": English hiring fairs and their meanings from the 14th to the 20th Century' *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1 (1988), pp.119-160; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, chs.5-6.

² Howell, D. W., 'The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales' *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp.270-271; Breen, R., 'Farm servanthood in Ireland, 1900-40' *Economic History Review*, 36 (1983), pp.89-90; Bradley, D., *Farm labourers: Irish struggle 1900-1976* (Athol Books, Belfast, 1988), pp.15-16; Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed: farm workers' trade unions in Wales, 1889-1950* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1989), pp.8-9; Hiring fairs had more or less died out in the west of England by 1900; Miller, C., 'Master and Man', p.207.

³ Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, p.224; Roberts, in an informative discussion of the social position of the hiring fairs, concludes that 'the fair provided a multi-layered process of symbolic change, which was too complex to be seen as the work of the authorities alone, too mysterious to be quite the artefact of an outsider's view, and yet too vulnerable to short-term change to be entirely the result of the servant's initiative. It was in this flexible ambivalence that the durability of the hiring fair lay.' (Roberts, M., 'Waiting upon chance', p.125).

studies¹. Many of the retired workers and farmers interviewed in Dumfriesshire and East Lothian did not attend hiring fairs simply because they did not begin their working careers until the fairs were well in decline. Those who did go confirm hiring practices that have been identified at fairs throughout the rest of Britain.

At the fair it was the farmer who approached the workers and started the negotiating:

'Yen farmer would tell another yen that that [man] was for hire...They would come and ask you. We wouldnae gan and ask them, they would come and ask you....You just stood and waited until somebody came and offered you a job.'²

At first, this may sound as if the farmers had a negotiating advantage, picking out the workers that suited them, with the servants powerless to affect the situation. However, the worker retained the ability to refuse a job offer, particularly if the farmer offered a low wage or had a bad reputation³. In south-east Scotland the reliance on the farmer to initiate negotiations disappeared with the introduction of employment registers in the 1920s.

'It was the farmer who approached you. Well, take a fair-sized farm that had a grieve, well the grieve would go with the farmer. The grieve he kent most of the men, and he kent what they were needing. Well he'd walk round, and meet in with somebody he kent, and talking to them, and "What are you for doing this year?", "Oh, I'm seeking a place", "Oh perhaps you would like suiting us", "Oh alright," well he would just take you to the farmer, and then barter for a while until you made a bargain. That was out in the open, then it got to be that you had to register. Oh it was a better thing, it was inside the hall. You went in in the morning and put your name on the register, or you sent word to the Union and they put your name in. Well, the farmers went in seeking men, and look through the register. You could put your name down and what you [were] - ploughman, cattleman, orraman. Your number would be shouted out, and you went up to a room and the farmer was waiting on you. Oh it was a better idea as outside.'⁴

In all cases the negotiations were ended by the farmer handing over a small sum of money called 'arles' (usually 2-3 shillings), sealing the agreement.

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, ch.5; Adams, D.G., *Bothy nights and days*, pp.46-50. Both books concentrates on the North-East.

² Interview Raeburn.

³ Interview Raeburn and Trotter.

⁴ Interview Trotter.

Before the registers were introduced, the only definite method of the farmer identifying the particular skills and experience of a prospective employee (cattlemen, ploughmen, etc.) was to ask each individual worker; and this explains why some took their grieves to the fair¹. One farmer, who was new to East Lothian (Mr. Graham), relied heavily on his griever for expert local knowledge. Farmers would probably only know a limited number of workers by sight, and this made identifying workers with specific skills a time-consuming task². In 1912 and 1913 the East Lothian Farmers' Club attempted to introduce a system of badges, which would help farmers identify the different types of workers, but the experiment proved unpopular with workers³; and such concerns were a certain cause of the development of the register system. However, the registers only occurred in areas where both farmers and workers were relatively well organized, and they were conspicuous by their absence in Dumfriesshire. The hiring fairs retained a much more active role in East Lothian than the South-West during the 1930s, and the explanation must surely lie in the success of registers in the former area.

Nevertheless, in a period of improving communications and high literacy rates, the appeal of newspaper advertisements, where farmers could specify the type of workers required and not have to go through the rigours of the hiring fair, was bound to increase. By the 1930s only some of the workers in lowland Scotland were automatically receiving hiring day as a holiday⁴, and one East Lothian farmer remembered the annual holiday being switched from the hiring day to July in the 1920s⁵. The fairs were partly kept going by their appeal as a customary general holiday⁶, particularly in Dumfriesshire where the movement for worker holidays was slow to develop⁷. The power of custom over economic rationale in labour market behaviour has been emphasised by other historians, and the continued survival of the hiring fairs

¹ *Royal Commission on labour*, Pt. II, p.100; Interview Forrest.

² However, one Dumfriesshire worker (Mr. Hunter) pointed out that ploughmen and dairymen tended to form into separate groups at the Fair since all they ever talked about was their work.

³ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 9 February 1912, 14 February 1913; *Scottish Farm Servant*, February 1914, p.1.

⁴ Interview Douglas, Porteus, Main.

⁵ Interview Forrest.

⁶ Interview Porteus.

⁷ See chapter 8.

throughout lowland Scotland owed much to the traditional behavioural patterns of both farmers and workers¹.

Hiring Fairs in Dumfriesshire

Table 1: Hiring fairs in lowland Dumfriesshire, 1900-39

Place	Name	Date	Type of workers	Last Report
Dumfries	Candlemas	mid Feb.	All	1938
	March	March/April	All	1938
	Whitsunday	May/June	Single	1937
	Roodmas	Sept./Oct.	Single	1937
	Martinmas	early Dec.	Single	mid 1930s
Lockerbie	Whitsunday	April/May	All	mid 1930s
	Martinmas	Oct./Nov.	All	early 1920s
Annan	Candlemas	mid. Feb.	Single	mid 1920s
	Whitsunday	early May	All	1936
	Martinmas	mid Oct.	All	1937

Source: *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*

A large number of fairs were identified as having existed in Dumfriesshire. The major ones are mentioned in the table above, but there were also fairs, particularly earlier in the century, at Langholm, Moffat and Sanquhar. However these served primarily upland areas, which involved only a small number of workers.

Most of the fairs, especially those in Dumfries, continued throughout the period, and Dumfries remained the major centre for worker recruitment through the open markets. Lockerbie and Annan were regarded as direct alternatives by employers and workers, given their geographical proximity, and the occurrence of fairs at Martinmas and Whitsunday within a week of each other. This may help to explain the complete demise of the fairs in

¹ I am particularly thinking of Hobsbawm, E., 'Custom, wages and work-load in nineteenth-century industry' in *idem*, *Labouring men: studies in the history of labour* (Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1964), pp.344-370.

Lockerbie by the mid 1930s, two centres could not support the limited number of workers and employers from the local region (Annandale). The Candlemas fair at Annan was never popular, in 1902 it was commented that 'the attendance of servants was smaller than for many years past'¹, and a similar problem of early unpopularity affected the Lockerbie Martinmas fair². Like the other early disappearances, the Annan Candlemas fair probably suffered from competition from the popular Whitsunday market, which reported continued high attendances throughout the pre-war period. The disappearance of the Dumfries Martinmas fair is more of a puzzle, pre-war attendances were large, yet by the early 1930s employers were refusing to use it, a likely reflection of their dissatisfaction at hiring workers after the November term (28th November). In fact the use of a hiring fair at the November term was in abject decline, the earliest, the Roodmas fair at Dumfries, was rapidly degenerating into a general day-out for workers who continued to receive it as a holiday. Prior to the First World War, workers had preferred to wait until after November 28th before hiring at Martinmas, therefore gaining a week's holiday. Small attendances were reported during the 1920s, and by the 1930s this fair was not being used for hiring purposes at all³.

Similar problems faced the usually popular spring fairs, even before the 1914-18 War.

'There was a large influx of servants, and the morning trains were crowded. The amount of hiring appeared to be less than usual, and by far the largest proportion of servants who visited the town were out for a holiday. The practice of farmers and servants coming to an arrangement through the medium of the "Standard" is largely on the increase. Large numbers of the latter spent most of the afternoon at the shows on the Sands, and a good many also engaged in dancing at St. Mary's Hall.'⁴

The fairs faced greatest competition from the newspapers, even prior to 1914⁵. After the war, the role of the press accelerated, and by the late 1920s/early 1930s they had emerged as the dominant medium for recruitment.

¹ *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 15 February 1902.

² *ibid*, 1 November 1902.

³ *ibid*, 30 September 1933, 29 September 1937; similarly little actual hiring was done at the Annan Martinmas fair.

⁴ *ibid*, 28 March 1914, referring to Dumfries March fair.

⁵ Dumfries Roodmas fair, *ibid*, 30 September 1911.

'There was a good attendance of men, but very few farmers and no business was transacted. "Farmers now do all their hiring through the 'Standard'," said one man when asked if there had been any hirings, "and don't bother coming to the fairs".'¹

Facing a declining potential market, some smaller fairs were bound to disappear, and even the larger established ones in Dumfries struggled to attract employers and workers - 'Year by year the traditional practice of street hiring is dying out.'² Reports on those that remained consistently identified the press as the major cause of decline, and by the late 1930s, very few workers were hired through the Dumfriesshire fairs³.

Hiring Fairs in East Lothian

With the existence of only one contractual date in East Lothian, 28th May, hiring fairs occurred on a less frequent basis than in Dumfriesshire, mainly during the spring. There were two major centres, Dunbar and Haddington, with many workers located in the west of the county also attending the fair at Dalkeith (Midlothian). Evidence from oral history indicates that these separate centres did tend to monopolise recruitment within their local areas⁴, though it was not uncommon for servants to attend two of them in order to increase their coverage of employers. The interchangeability was facilitated by the different dates on which these three hirings occurred, Dunbar - the first Tuesday in February, Haddington - the first Friday in February, and Dalkeith - the last Thursday in February⁵. Dalkeith was the least important in terms of the East Lothian labour market given its location in another county, and therefore the present analysis will focus on Dunbar and Haddington.

¹ Dumfries Candlemas fair, *ibid*, 14 February 1934.

² Dumfries Whitsunday fair, *ibid*, 30 May 1934.

³ Dumfries Candlemas, *ibid*, 16 February 1938; Dumfries March, *ibid*, 27 March 1935; Dumfries Whitsunday, *ibid*, 3 June 1936; Annan Whitsunday, *ibid*, 5 May 1934; Annan Martinmas, *ibid*, 20 October 1934.

⁴ Interview Waite.

⁵ *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.65.

The pattern of decline of these fairs is similar to that of Dumfriesshire. Already by the turn of the century the fairs were increasingly being identified as days-out by the workers rather than institutions for recruitment.

'Friday was the time-honoured hiring day, an occasion which, however decadent, or indeed defunct, in other portions of the country, survives in East Lothian with apparent perculial vitality....both farmers and servants are yearly making more general use of advertisements as a means of suiting one another, a system that is not only more satisfactory from all practical points of view, but also leaves both free for the rest of the day. This is not a small consideration when it is remembered that largely the day is regarded as a holiday and occasion of friendly meeting and enjoyment. With such attractions it is likely to long survive, while the actual "hiring" largely slips under the modern system of advertisement and appointment. The change is peculiar and interesting, as evidencing the not infrequently witnessed instance of a moribund custom changing its form, and there with securing a new course of existence.'¹

The general conclusion during the pre-war period was that an increasing proportion of hiring was being done outside the fairs, but 'at the same time much hiring is done in the old-fashioned way.'² The fairs continued to present a spectacle of a busy open-air market.

In fact early attempts had been made at both Haddington and Dunbar to remove the hiring from the open streets, and place them in the more congenial and 'civilised' atmosphere of a large public hall - the Corn Exchange at Dunbar and the Assembly Rooms at Haddington. However, these experiments, which were reported as highly successful, were terminated by the demand for public buildings for military use during the First World War³. The practice of indoor hiring was resurrected during the mid 1920s by the SFSU and the National Farmers' Union, who were able to introduce a system of registers at many hiring fairs throughout south-east Scotland, in particular in East Lothian, an undoubted function of their successful organisation within the county⁴. Employment registers were a particular policy of the trade union, who saw them as a means to facilitate the flow of accurate information concerning workers available for hire and vacancies, and to terminate the practice of hiring in the open air which was

¹ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 8 February 1901 with reference to Haddington.

² *ibid*, 9 February 1906, Haddington.

³ *ibid*, 20 January 1915, Haddington.

⁴ *ibid*, 5 March 1926, Haddington; East Lothian District Library, Local History Centre, Ak 22.7, 'Letter from Stirling & Burnet to John Durie, 25 November 1943'.

at the mercy of the unpredictable Scottish weather¹. Similar combined efforts managed to shift the dates of the hirings one month forward, from February to March, and to change the day of the main event in Haddington from a Friday to a Thursday². These were all part of an agreed strategy of introducing a workers' annual holiday in June/July to replace the one usually given to most workers on hiring day, and bringing the actual time of recruitment closer to that of the contract term.

However, it continued to be apparent that the hiring fair was in terminal decline - 'Year by year the animated scenes associated with hiring day are fast disappearing'³, though, unlike in Dumfriesshire, none of the fairs disappeared entirely, and reports on Dunbar and Haddington fairs continued to appear in the *Haddingtonshire Courier* throughout the 1930s. The picture painted for the hiring market was, nevertheless, very different to that of pre-war, no longer were the streets crammed with persons, whether seeking employment or just at leisure. In Dunbar the stalls and shows were shifted out of the High Street and into a public parking area, leaving the traditional hiring place devoid of much of its attraction⁴. In Haddington efforts by the local authorities to restrict the existence of a fair in the main central streets had a similar impact.

'The annual hiring fair was held at Haddington yesterday, when there was a smaller attendance than usual of farmers and farm servants. As has been usual for the past few years, hiring took place in the Corn Exchange....Except for a stall in front of the Corn Exchange there was little evidence on the streets that yesterday was the hiring day.'⁵

Newspapers

The previous section has already indicated how advertisements in newspapers came to dominate farm labour recruitment by the 1930s. However, hiring through this medium was not uncommon prior to 1914 in both East Lothian and Dumfriesshire, where the papers were full of

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, October 1926, p.112; February 1926, p.176. See chapter 8 for further details of SFSU activities within the locality.

² *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 14 March 1919 & 5 March 1926, Haddington; 5 March 1920, 4 March 1921, Dunbar; *Scottish Farm Servant*, February 1919, p.255.

³ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 15 March 1929. The decline of the fairs is described in an editorial in the *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 14 March 1932 - 'Hiring Fairs'.

⁴ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 16 March 1934.

⁵ *ibid*, 14 March 1932.

advertisements for farmworkers. The primary focus for advertising was the local newspapers, the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* and the *Haddingtonshire Courier*, though a number of interviewees reported using the *Scottish Farmer* (a national farming paper)¹. Most of the jobs were advertised at the same time as the hiring fairs took place, February/March for the May term, and September/October for the November term in Dumfriesshire². The development of newspaper hiring was strongest for the most skilled workers, especially the shepherds where the selection of the 'right' worker was of prime importance³. Newspaper advertisements did have a certain precision to them that the hiring fair lacked. On the other hand, the information was often limited (the following examples are from the *Haddingtonshire Courier*).

1st February, 1901

CATTLEMAN, or Orraman, who could look after sheep in summer, and other odd jobs. Wanted at May term; with workers or boy preferred. Apply *Courier* office to-day, between 11 and 12; or Steward, Crowhill, Innerwick

PLOUGHMEN (Two), and Cattleman, with workers. Wanted for term. Apply Shiels, Carfrae.

5th March, 1937

FOREMAN Ploughman. Wanted for term, with Woman Worker; also Man for second pair, with Wife or Daughter to assist in house. Cadzow, Samuelston, Pencaitland.

PLOUGHMAN Wanted, with Youth for odd pair. No.95 *Courier* Office.

The advertisements usually gave the type of worker required, whether any other workers were needed, and the name of the farm and/or farmer. There were clear benefits under such a system; the worker was presented with a range of vacancies which fitted his/her particular skills and circumstances, and the farmer would receive applications from the desired occupational group, therefore the provision of information was more accurately and widely diffused than at the hiring fair. The last example contains a newspaper office number as opposed to the name of the farm. This was unusual, some

¹ Interview Douglas, Sykes, Heard, McIntyre, Maxwell (worker).

² Some shepherds in the Lothians and Borders were hired in November for the May term, i.e. six months in advance; interview Trotter.

³ *Royal Commission on labour*, Pt.II, p.100 and 190. Interview Heard, Maxwell (worker)

interviewees believed that it was only farmers with bad reputations who used numbers, in order to prevent easy identification; one farmer claimed that if he had done such a thing then workers would have never applied¹. The main disadvantage to recruitment through the newspapers was that worker and farmer were not located within a convenient market-place where negotiations could instantly begin. Unless a meeting was arranged by letter (as in the quotation at the beginning of the chapter), the onus was on the worker, who was expected to get to the farm as soon as possible, usually by bicycle and in the evenings. The prime aim of the worker was to get to a potential employer before another suitable applicant². The transport technology available to most workers (the bicycle) limited the distance they could realistically travel, and ensured that recruitment remained relatively localised; though in one known case a worker cycled all-night to find employment:

'I once advertised in the *Standard*for a fellow to help feed the cattle. I was out at half-past five to feed the cattle in the morning and here there's a fellow standing at the byre door - "Bye jove", I says, "You've been early on the job" - "All night" - "How did you manage that?" - "Oh, I biked from Sanquhar" - that was 30 miles.'³

Registers and Local Contacts

Recruitment in Scottish agriculture was heavily reliant on local knowledge by both farmers and workers. The importance of the provision of information stimulated the establishment of a number of informal registers, usually by retailers as a sideline to their activities when dealing with farm-based customers, and by delivery-men undertaking regular journeys to the farms⁴.

However, in their enthusiasm to examine the existence of historical phenomena (notably the hiring fair), many historians have failed to recognise that a principal method of recruitment was through informal local contacts⁵. Such a medium had distinct advantages, information was often reliable, especially when combined with personal experience, whether it be

¹ Interview Drysdale, Main, Porteus and Leckie.

² Interview Drysdale, Hastings, Smart, Scott, Barber.

³ Interview Maxwell (farmer).

⁴ Interview Drysdale and Denholm.

⁵ I am thinking in particular of Ian Carter and Stephen Caunce.

of a worker's knowledge of a particular farm or a farmer's recommendation of a particular worker. Popular sources of vacancy information for workers were family, friends/colleagues, and even present employers - one interviewee referring to the system as the 'bush telegraph'¹.

'At that time I was leaving, I was gan up to the bowling [club], he says [a farmer] - "They tell me your leaving, Jimmy" - "Aye" - "My Uncle John's wanting a boy to work the horse up at Penpont, away go up and see him, I'll tell him about you". So that weekend...[the farmer] said, "Dinnae come back the nicht, tomorrow morning go and see John Dalziel he's looking for you", so I got hired then.'²

'I went to see Mr. Forrest, he knew about us because he was passing the farm every day, and he knew of me. So I hadnae any bother getting in there. And the same when [a job at] Highfield came up again, they wanted a tractorman, and I knew the job was coming up, because the friend that was with me at Highfield [previously] was still there. So I just went up and seen him [the farmer]. Of course, I got the job right away because of my previous record.'³

Some employers expressed a preference for local contacts as the easiest and most reliable method of recruitment, relying particularly on other farmers and grieves for information on workers who were intending to leave their present employment⁴.

Re-hiring

The majority of workers were re-hired at the end of their six month or annual fixed-term contracts, although levels of turnover varied greatly across different worker groups and individual farms⁵. Before the relevant hiring fairs took place, an employer would seek out his employees individually and discuss future contractual arrangements, a process commonly known as 'Speaking Time'. The exact timing of speaking time varied, those who hired for May were spoken to in February/March, and those for November in September/October. The exception was shepherds who were generally re-hired in November for the May term. This has its origins in the system of only

¹ Interview Porteus.

² Interview Scott.

³ Interview Leckie.

⁴ Interview Gass, Matthewson, Black.

⁵ See chapter 7

paying workers their cash wage every six months, a system that continued with many shepherds, particularly those involved with 'outbye' flocks, with the mid term payment (on a twelve month contract) being in November¹. Sometimes the farmer took each worker aside at work and spoke to them², but the most popular and more discreet method was for the farmer to visit the workers' cottages.

'The farmers use to come round every year, about say the first Tuesday of March or February. [They] would just go round all the different houses, and see if there were any complaints, or if they wanted away. If the farmer didn't go to a house they [the workers] knew they were flitting.'³

The policy of not speaking to workers who were not going to be re-hired was fairly widespread, and Mr. Wright (an East Lothian farmer, who was new to the area in the mid 1920s) almost lost all his workers in the first year over an ignorance of the 'speaking time' custom. Some employers did tell their workers if they were not needed, and occasionally the reasons why; however, it was always a difficult subject to approach workers with, particularly if protracted negotiations were likely over a new agreement or if the farmer was terminating a contract. One farmer used the simple phrase - 'I'll be needing your house at the term' - as a method of informing workers that they would not be required from May⁴. On re-hiring, many workers received the 'arles' as a token of the new contract, whether or not the contractual conditions had altered.

¹ Interview Heard, Black, Matthewson, Sykes.

² Interview Raeburn.

³ Interview Foggo.

⁴ Interview Black.

RECRUITMENT AND CONTRACTS: Theory and Empirical Evidence

Labour economics has identified the process of recruitment, signalling and screening, as an important factor in the efficiency of market operation. Effective signalling and screening by workers and employers of their requirements at low cost is the desired circumstance, one in which the forces of demand and supply can act smoothly. The critical factor is the provision of information about worker and employer characteristics.

Once in employment, both workers and employers are expected to conform to the contractual conditions. Those that are explicitly laid down, for example the level of pay and the length of contract, can be enforced through the legal process; however, all employment contracts also have implicit conditions attached, particularly regarding the way in which employers and workers should treat one another. Employment law often does not take these implicit conditions into account, and in any case they are, by their very nature, difficult to prove in a court of law.

Both recruitment and contract enforcement in the Scottish agricultural labour market relied on the efficient and low-cost distribution of accurate information about employers and employees. For recruitment, this meant that workers and farmers were able to match their demand and supply requirements easily, the result being an efficient and balanced allocation of labour. Once in employment, the contractual conditions were effectively enforced through 'reputations', the creation and dissemination of which was a direct function of the availability of information. Therefore, the successful operation of the particular recruitment mechanisms and contracts in the labour market in Scottish agriculture hinged on the low-cost provision of accurate information concerning the agents involved (the farmers and farm servants).

It would be foolish to claim that farmers and workers were operating in a perfect market, not all the information received was accurate and sometimes it was difficult to find out about an individual, particularly if he/she was from outside the local area. Some historians have focused on the hiring fair as the major provider of information, and there is no doubt that by collecting all the prospective employers and workers into a single place on the same day, information was rapidly diffused. Both employers and workers would use the opportunity to consult their colleagues as to the characteristics of a specific

farm, farmer or worker¹. However, there were other media for information². The high rates of mobility amongst workers, usually within the local area, meant that on a single farm the combined employment experience of all the workers would be widespread. Also workers did have opportunities to meet regularly and discuss what the farmers were wanting in terms of labour for the next year and which were the good and bad farms.

'In the ploughing time, when you finished at night, maybe one night a week, they all collected at the smithy with their couter, that's the thing that's on the plough, to get it sharpened. And they had great confabs in the smithy, ken all the surrounding farms, all the work that was going on and things like that.'³

Farmers regularly consulted each other, and their more senior workers, about labour issues. They met each week at the local livestock markets, as well as socially; as one commented, 'it was amazing how news got around locally.'⁴ Many, when hiring labour, obtained references from previous employers. One worker complained that if he went to a farm for a job, the farmer would leave him standing on the doorstep while he telephoned his previous employer⁵.

All this ensured that the decline of the hiring fairs did not put a stop to the flows of information. Farmers and workers opted for recruiting mechanisms that provided a more accurate supply of information, the newspapers, and also the development of registers at the hiring fairs in East Lothian. Although custom, in particular the requirement for an annual holiday, ensured that the hiring fairs died a slow death; the appeal of recruitment mechanisms that did not involve standing out in the open street grew, a consequence of the widespread availability of cheap newspapers and of universal literacy, and developments in transport and communications technology (the bicycle and the telephone). In any case, a primary method of recruitment remained local contacts, a method that was reliant on established information networks. The

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, pp.142-148; Reed, M. and Wells, R. (eds.), *Class, conflict and protest in the English countryside 1700-1880* (Cass, London, 1990), pp.103-104; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, ch.5.

² The 'bothy ballads', a well-documented oral source of information on farm conditions, were confined to the north-east, and no equivalent songs occurred in southern Scotland; Munro, B., 'The bothy ballads: the social context and meaning of the farm servants' songs of north-eastern Scotland' *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (1977), pp.184-193; Carter, I., *Farmlife*, pp.148-153; Fenton, A., 'Introduction' to *Ord's bothy songs and ballads of Aberdeen Banff and Moray, Angus and the Mearns* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1990), pp.xiv-xv.

³ Interview Douglas.

⁴ Interview Matthewson.

⁵ Interview Porteus.

critical point is that all the recruitment mechanisms provided extensive information on a wide range of employers and workers at a minimal cost.

The same conditions also facilitated the successful enforcement of contracts, particularly the implicit conditions which did not come under the jurisdiction of the courts. The fear of obtaining a bad reputation was enough to prevent the majority of farmers from circumventing their contractual requirements, and coercing the farm servants into more oppressive employment conditions. The creation of reputations did depend on what rural society considered to be acceptable behaviour, and we have seen how the norms of employer and employee behaviour could be altered in accordance with general social perceptions, for example, with the payment of wage during sickness becoming a responsibility of the state. However, most of the conditions, whether explicit or implicit, were well established.

Therefore the rules of the game, both in terms of explicit and implicit contract conditions, were well known, and the effectiveness of market operations ensured that they were widely enforced through reputations¹. Simultaneously, the efficiency of such operations also facilitated a satisfactory matching of vacancies and workers, a function of the low costs of signalling and screening. Information was the critical factor, and it certainly appears that the Scottish agricultural labour market, during the years 1900-39, operated in a much more efficient manner than many labour markets do today.

¹ The importance of reputations has been stressed by other Scottish rural historians; Munro, B., 'The bothy ballads', pp.188-190; Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, pp.148-154.

Chapter 7: The unambiguous mobility of farm servants¹

Introduction

A growing perception of the importance of the microeconomic operation of the labour market has led labour economists to investigate worker mobility. In economic theory, labour turnover entails costs to the employer, the loss of a trained workforce and the requirement to recruit new workers, and for the worker, possible temporary loss of income and the financial cost of moving to a new place of residence. What makes a worker move has been the focus of much attention; the list of potential causes can be almost endless - wages, housing, relations with employers, relations with other employees, cyclical and structural variations in the labour market, family-related demands (education, health, marriage) - all can be described as a worker's effort to maximise individual or household utility. Of particular interest has been the varied rates of mobility amongst different groups of workers, and rates of turnover within specific industries and firms, and the implications this has for economics of labour supply².

Economic historians have also expanded their research to such considerations, with a lead being taken by early modern historians where high rates of labour mobility are now the established orthodoxy³. Such interest has spread into the nineteenth century, where continued high rates of mobility for some groups have been identified⁴. However, little direct link has been made with the microeconomic analyses undertaken by economists, and the present literature on Britain remains chronologically and methodologically behind that of the United States where work has begun to look at more recent labour market patterns⁵. The only published

¹ With apologies to Ann Kussmaul, 'The ambiguous mobility of farm servants' *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), pp.222-235.

² Joll, C., McKenna, C., McNabb, R. and Shorey, J., *Developments in labour market analysis* (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1983), ch.7; Ehrenberg, R.G. and Smith, R.S., *Modern labor economics: theory and public policy* (Scott, Foreman and Co., Illinois, 1988), ch.10.

³ For a survey of the most significant contributions to this literature see Clark, P. and Souden, D. (eds.), *Migration and society in early modern England* (Hutchison, London, 1988).

⁴ Nicholas, S., 'Intercounty labour mobility during the industrial revolution: evidence from Australian transportation records' *Oxford Economic Papers*, 39 (1987), pp.624-640; Southall, H., 'The tramping artisan revisits: labour mobility and economic distress in early Victorian England' *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991), pp.272-296.

⁵ Jacoby, S.M. and Sharma, S., 'Employment duration and industrial labor mobility in the United States, 1880-1980' *Journal of Economic History*, 52 (1992), pp.161-179; Owen, L.J., 'The decline in turnover of manufacturing workers: case study evidence from the 1920s'

study of the economic history of worker mobility in modern Britain makes the following conclusion:

'The wide interest in the subject stems from the variety of complex issues that it embraces, in particular, the causes and consequences of labor mobility, which affect the individual, the organization, the economy, and society. Most of the studies concerned with turnover deal with contemporary data and are primarily designed to guide organizations and managers in their endeavours to analyze, understand, and effectively predict and control the movement of their members or labor force. So far historians have made little use of the study of turnover in their research, although the interdisciplinary approach has become increasingly pervasive. There is no reason why this field of study should not be applied in an investigation of organizations in the past. With the aid of contemporary methodology, we can better understand the dynamics of labor forces, voluntary associations, and other organizations.'¹

Mobility within the agricultural workforce

The historical study of farm servant mobility in Britain has already received some attention, a consequence of the continual high rates of movement which identified farm service as a distinctive occupational experience². The work of Kussmaul focused on the classic English farm servant, a single male between the age of fifteen and thirty³. In early twentieth century southern Scotland the majority of farm servants hired in household groups, and farm service was not a temporary life-cycle experience for young males prior to marriage as in England and Wales; therefore, the potential for immediate comparisons on labour market behaviour is limited⁴.

Journal of Economic History, 52 (1992), pp.459-461. Historians of the early twentieth century British economy remain obsessed with the study of unemployment, the literature has been prolific; for overviews see, Hatton, T.J., 'The analysis of unemployment in interwar Britain: a survey of research' *Centre for Economic Policy Research. Discussion paper no.66* (CEPR, London, 1985); Garside, W.R., *British unemployment, 1919-1939: a study in public policy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), ch.1.

¹ Shpayer-Makov, H., 'Measuring labor turnover in historical research' *Historical Methods*, 24 (1991), pp.25.

² Kussmaul, A.S., 'The ambiguous mobility', p.222; see also Kussmaul, A., *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981), ch.4; Houston, R., 'Frequent flitting': geographic mobility and social structure in mid-nineteenth-century Greenlaw' *Scottish Studies*, 27 (1983), pp.31-47.

³ Farm servants in Wales were also primarily drawn from this age group, and always unmarried; Jenkins, D., *The agricultural community in south-west Wales at the turn of the twentieth century* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1971), p.77; Howell, D.W., 'The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales' *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), pp.262-263.

⁴ See chapter 3.

More worrying in its absence, has been the failure to extend an understanding of Scottish population movements into the twentieth century, for Scotland has an long-established history of population mobility¹. Mobility amongst farm servants in Scotland is of particular interest because it was regarded as an important issue by many contemporary observers, who linked it to the absence of stable communities in rural areas, the bad condition of agricultural housing, and the poor educational performance of children.

'The effect of the system of tied houses on farms is that every time a farm worker changes his employer he must change his house. This is one of the chief causes of the excessive migration of farm workers in Scotland. This has many serious social disadvantages, only two of which we would refer to here: (1) the notorious retardation of farm workers' children in education, not only due to the frequent migrations, but to the long distances they have to travel to school, and (2) the isolation of women folks, who have little opportunity for social life. But this migration is an important factor in creating the low standard of housing. The best property rapidly deteriorates if there are frequent changes of occupants, but when frequent changes occur in houses which are of a poor standard to commence with, the result is the neglect of maintenance which is a common feature of all farm cottages. Where occupants change so frequently, and no one has any security in his house beyond twelve months, it is no one's concern to make the house a home.'²

In addition, mobility had a key role to play in the operation of the labour market, through the effective enforcement of implicit contracts via reputations. Movement provided not only an opportunity to change employers, but also a mechanism for the efficient flow of market information³.

¹ Houston, R.A. and Withers, C.W.J., 'Population mobility in Scotland and Europe, 1600-1900: a comparative perspective' *Annales de Démographie Historique* (1990), pp.285-308.

² *Report on rural housing in Scotland* (P.P.1936-37, XI, Cd.5462), p.67. Similar concerns are expressed in the following: *Royal Commission on Labour: the agricultural labourer, III* (P.P.1893-4, XXXVI, Cd.6894), Pt.II, summary report on the Lothians and Fife, pp.12-13; *Report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban* (P.P.1917-18, XIV, Cd.8731), pp.169-170; BOAS, *Report of the Committee on women in agriculture in Scotland* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1920), pp.11-12; *Report of the Committee on farm workers in Scotland* (P.P.1935-36, VIII, Cd.5217), p.13. The Scottish Farm Servants' Union also attacked the high mobility of its members - see a series of articles entitled 'Why do farm servants flit?' in the *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1927, p.264; July 1927, p.294; August 1927, p.304; September 1927, p.324; October 1927, p.347; November 1927, p.374; at the same time a considerable debate on farm servant mobility took place in the pages of the *Scottish Farmer*, 1927 pp.669, 705, 737, 1030, 1351, 1384, 1457, 1489, 1525, 1559, 1591, 1620, 1656, 1688, 1722 and 1753.

³ See chapter 6.

Material available for Scottish agriculture offers a unique opportunity through which to engage in a systematic study of worker mobility. Information on farm worker residential patterns can be obtained from Valuation Rolls, which were published on a county basis for the whole of the country from the 1860s to the late 1980s. A valuation roll is an annual valuation of property for the purposes of local taxation, however the data provided goes beyond just listing the owner and value of property. The entries also cite the name of any tenant (remembering most Scottish farmers were tenants), and the names and occupations of individuals to whom any property was sublet by the tenant (including workers living in tied housing). Thus an entry for a Dumfriesshire farm gives the following information:

Year	1911/12
Name of the property	Hallhills
Owner	J. Johnstone
Tenant (farmer)	T. Lindsay
Annual rental value of the farm (£)	422
Name and occupations of sub-tenants (workers)	William Dickson - Dairyman James Cargen - Shepherd Robert Graham - Cattleman

It is therefore easy to identify which farm a particular family was working on, since they would not have been occupying a tied cottage for any other reason, and, as has been established earlier, the vast majority of farm workers lived in tied housing¹. However, only the name and occupation of the head of household is listed, therefore single workers who hired separately from their parents and lived in a bothy or in the farmhouse were not included. The following analysis of the counties of Dumfries and East Lothian therefore excludes those single workers in Dumfries who did hire separately, but the coverage is universal in East Lothian because of the standard practice of family hiring. By examining such data it is possible to establish the links between levels of mobility, and the state of the labour market, and individual employer and worker characteristics. The resulting

¹ See chapter 3.

conclusions, in combination with oral history evidence, will enable us to answer the simple, but important, question - why did workers move?

Sampling

Attempting to track the movements of all farm worker households within East Lothian and Dumfries over the period 1900-39 would be a colossal task, and clearly demands some method of sampling. It must be remembered that in the study of worker mobility the characteristics of both employer and employee are of interest; therefore, two different samples, one of individual workers and the other of individual farms, are required.

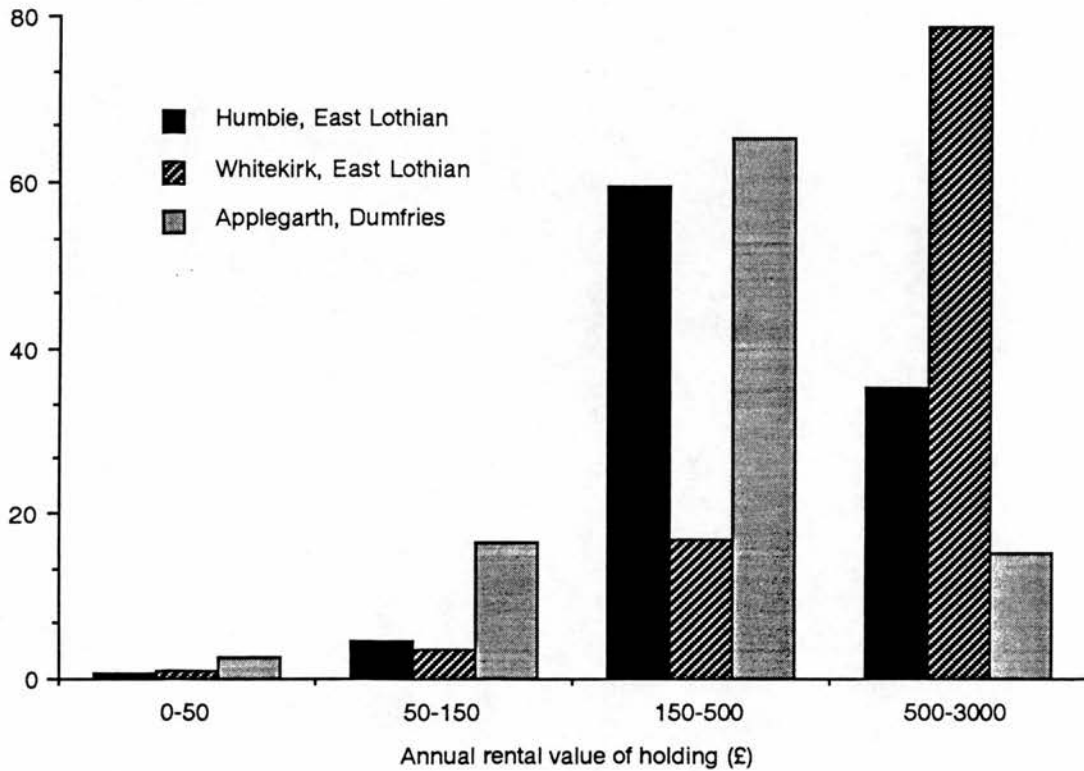
For workers, the problem is how to obtain a representative sample whilst ensuring that the mobility of individuals can be linked over a period of time, i.e. combining random or systematic sampling with nominal record linkage. The solution is letter-cluster sampling, a method which involves the alphabetic sampling of the relevant population; in this case all those farm servant entries on the valuation roll whose surname began with the letter 'G'. G was chosen because it provided the right size of sample in the two counties (between 50 and 100 entries each year), and it appeared to have no particular ethnic bias (for example 'O' may include a disproportionate number of Irish immigrants). The resulting databases for the years 1911/12-38/39 contained 2298 entries for East Lothian and 2271 for Dumfries.

For farms the main aim was to study the labour turnover experience of individual units. Since the valuation rolls are organised on the basis of civil parishes, the logical conclusion was to select a number of rural parishes with differing agricultural structures. The chosen parishes were Humble (2328 entries) and Whitekirk (3322 entries) in East Lothian, and Applegarth (1534 entries) in Dumfries, which together contained a total of 51 holdings. As can be seen in Graph 1 and Table 1, these three parishes had substantially different crop, livestock and holding patterns.

¹ Letter-cluster sampling is discussed in detail in Phillips, J.A., 'Achieving a critical mass while avoiding an explosion: letter-cluster sampling and nominal record linkage' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9 (1979), pp.493-508.

Graph 1

**Percentage of total land distribution by
rental value of holding, 1906**



Source: Occupiers of farms (Scotland) [P.P.1907, LXXIII, Cd.127]

Whitekirk was the 'classic' East Lothian parish - large farms, heavily geared towards crop production, with over a third of its acreage in cereals. Humble is located in an upland area, on the border between East and Midlothian, and Roxburghshire, and was reliant on sheep for its farm income. Applegarth, situated just north of Lockerbie, was typical of much of the South-West, with a concentration on general livestock (dairy and beef cattle, and sheep); in the late 1920s it was chosen by the Board of Agriculture for Scotland as one of half-a-dozen parishes typical of agricultural practices in Scotland¹.

¹ SRO, AF 43/251, *Agricultural survey. Parish of Applegarth, Dumfriesshire, 1927-8.*

Table 1: Crops, livestock and labour per 100 acres of cultivated land in the three selected parishes, 1921

	Humbie	Whitekirk	Applegarth
Arable	74.0	75.7	69.4
Wheat/Barley	10.3	26.3	0.1
Oats	16.2	12.6	19.4
Potatoes	1.0	10.7	1.2
Turnips	10.9	11.7	8.0
Rotation grass	34.4	11.9	38.7
Permanent grass	26.0	24.3	30.6
Cattle	7.8	10.6	23.7
Sheep	147.0	73.9	94.9
Rough grazing	16.0	0.0	52.3
Regular labour	2.1	4.4	1.7

Source: Agricultural Statistics, 1921

Mobility and economic conditions: a time-series analysis

For some time labour economists have concluded that worker mobility rates are related to cyclical fluctuations in levels of economic activity, the result being that employee quit rates tend to rise when the labour market is tight and fall when it is slack. Quite simply, workers are more likely to change jobs when the availability of vacancies and security in new employment improves, as would be expected when as an economy picks up¹. Southall, in his work on tramping artisans in nineteenth century England, concluded that this positive correlation between mobility and the business cycle was a relationship that was established with the development of 'modern' labour markets².

Evidence presented in chapter two describes substantial fluctuations in the Scottish agricultural labour market, particularly significant tightening immediately prior to and after the First World War, and slumps in the early 1920s and especially the early to mid 1930s. However, the present section of the thesis deals with East Lothian and Dumfries, which have substantially different production structures, a factor likely to impact on labour demand. In addition, the geographical locations imposed varied demands on the agricultural labour markets from other industries³. One possible indicator of the state of local labour markets is fluctuations in cash wages. Statistics on married ploughmen's wages for Dumfries and East Lothian are presented in Graph 2.

Figures are only available on a continual basis for the 1920s and 1930s, which show a number of important patterns⁴. Both counties share in the post 1920 slump, with East Lothian achieving a more substantial recovery 1923-5. East Lothian experiences a notable slump in wage levels during 1932-3, which was considerably smaller in Dumfries. This picture can be supported by evidence from the SFSU in its advice given to members on the state of

¹ Ehrenberg, R.G and Smith, R.S., *Modern labor economics*, pp.370-371.

² Southall believed that this was linked to 'the growing integration of local economies into the national system'; Southall, H., 'The tramping artisan revisited', p.294.

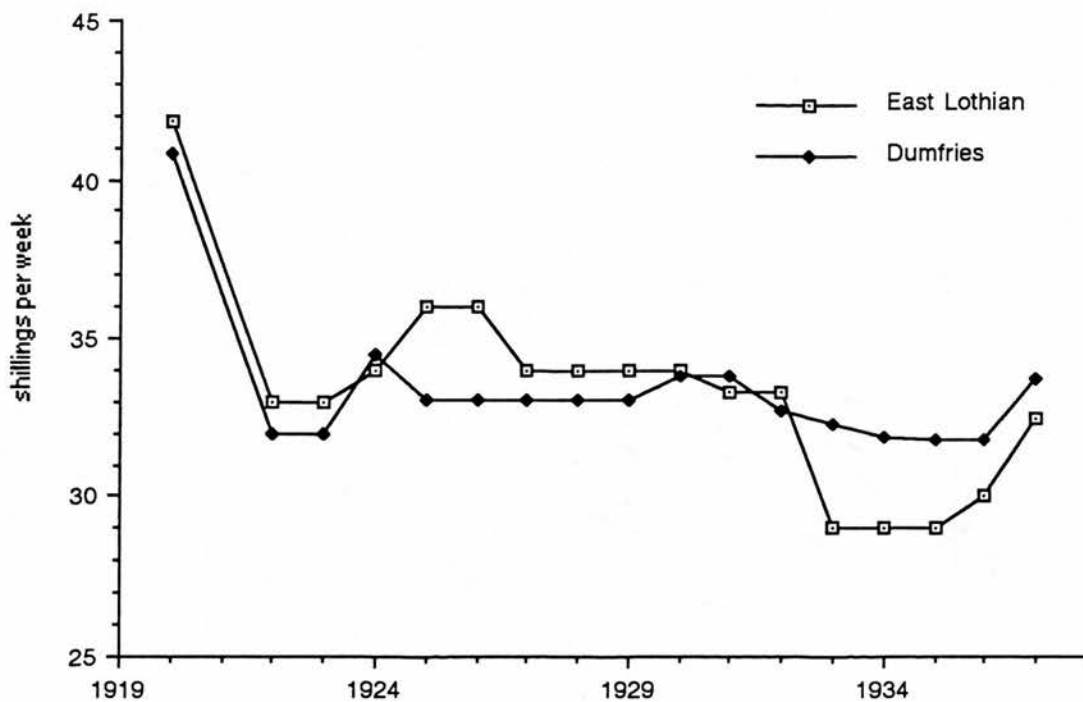
³ See chapter 5.

⁴ The Board of Agriculture for Scotland only began to collect county wage data on a regular basis during the 1920s. The figures in Graph 2 come from: *Report to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers in Scotland in 1919-20* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.67; Wilson, J., 'The fall in farm wages' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 5 (1922), p.408; *idem*, 'Farm wages and working hours in Scotland in summer 1923' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 6 (1923), p.449; B/DOAS, *Supplement to the monthly agricultural report - agricultural wages in Scotland, Whitsunday 1924, ..., Whitsunday 1937* (B/DOAS, Edinburgh, January and July 1924-38).

the labour market¹. High mobility levels were reported in 1914/15, with a slump in 1917². In 1923 both a recovery in wages and worker movement was identified, following a two year decline, with demand for labour continuing to rise through to 1925³. By 1928/9, indications were that the labour market was beginning to turn against the workers, however, the slump did not have a major impact on worker behaviour until after 1931⁴. Evidence of a recovery in the labour market occurred during the late 1930s⁵.

Graph 2

Married ploughmen's cash wages, Dumfries and East Lothian, 1920-37



Source: See text

¹ It must be remembered that the Union had a much stronger presence in East Lothian than in Dumfries, and therefore any remarks are more applicable to the former; see chapter 8.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, January 1915, p.10; June 1917, p.47.

³ SFSU branch circulars, 31 October 1923, 27 February 1925.

⁴ SFSU branch circular, 28 December 1928; *Scottish Farm Servant*, February 1931, p.220.

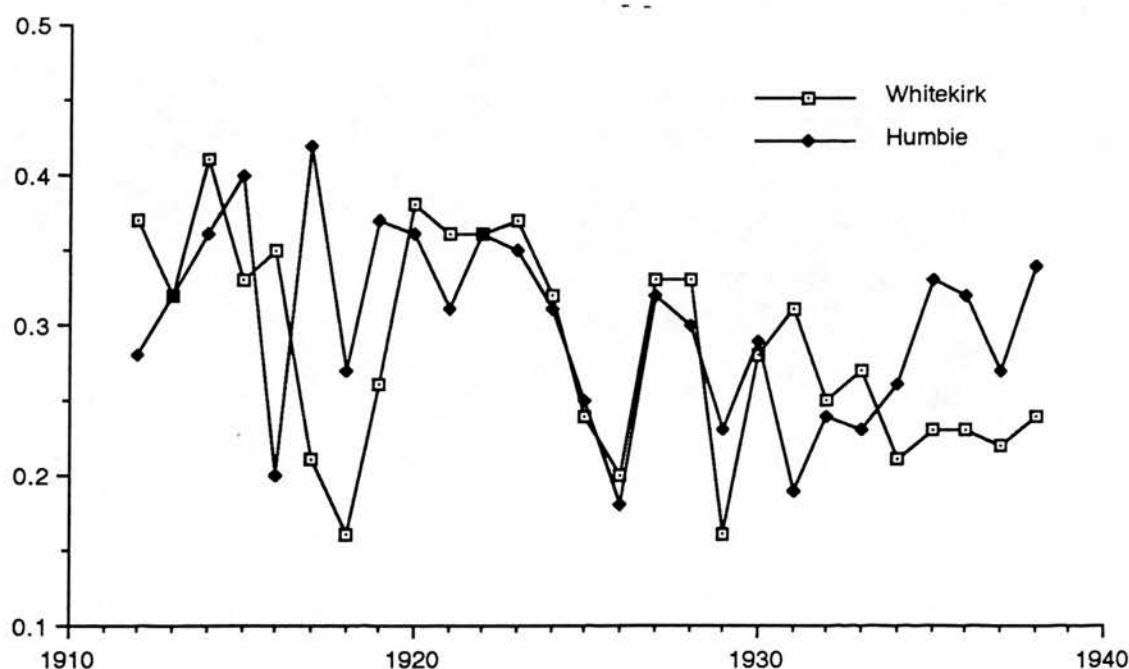
⁵ SFSU branch circulars, 30 June 1937, 30 May 1939.

There are two possible ways of measuring rates of mobility over time, the frequency of movement by certain individual workers, and turnover rates on individual production units (farms), which correspond to the two samples of specific workers and farms described in the previous section. Dealing with farms first, it was possible to calculate worker quit rates from farms using a methodology developed by Kussmaul, based on the proportion of workers who left farms in the selected parishes each year¹. The results are give in Graphs 3 and 4.

On East Lothian farms there were substantial fluctuations during the wartime period, followed by a sustained peak 1920-3. Erratic fluctuations then reoccurred with a noticeable peak in 1927-8, a slump in Humbie in the early 1930s was followed by recovery, while Whitekirk experienced a continual decline in quit rates throughout the 1930s. In Applegarth, mobility rates were generally high 1912-18/19, low through the early 1920s, high 1926-31, then declining to 1934 followed by recovery in the late 1930s.

Graph 3

Worker quit rates from East Lothian farms, 1912-1938

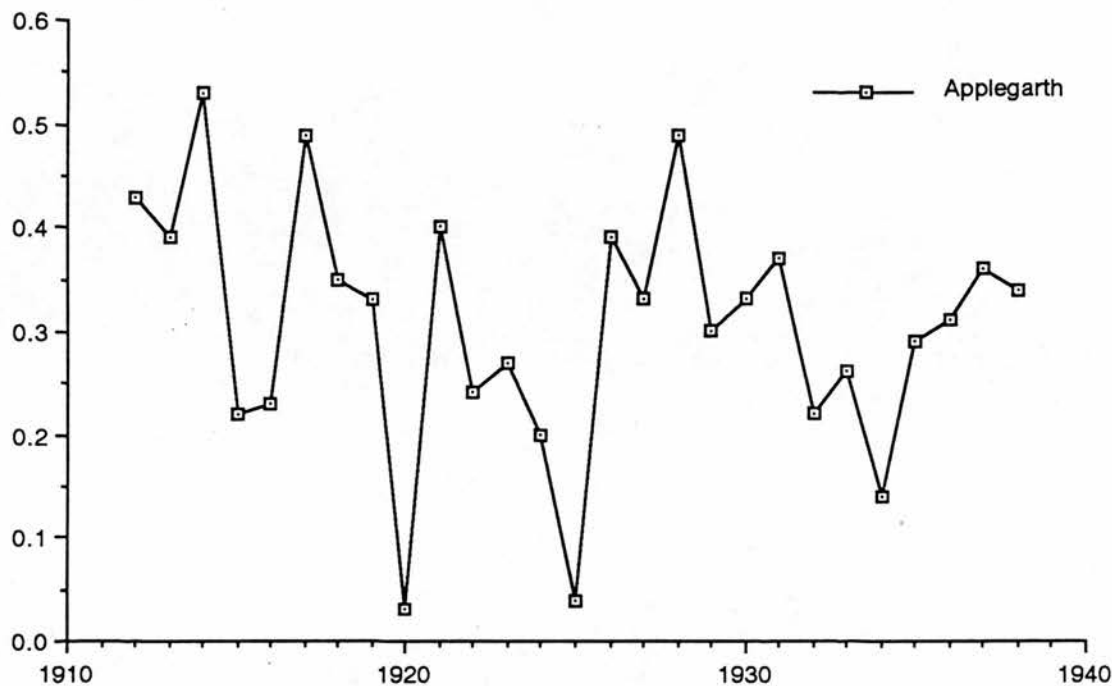


Source: Valuation Rolls, 1911/12-38/39

¹ Kussmaul, A., 'The ambiguous mobility of farm servants'.

Graph 4

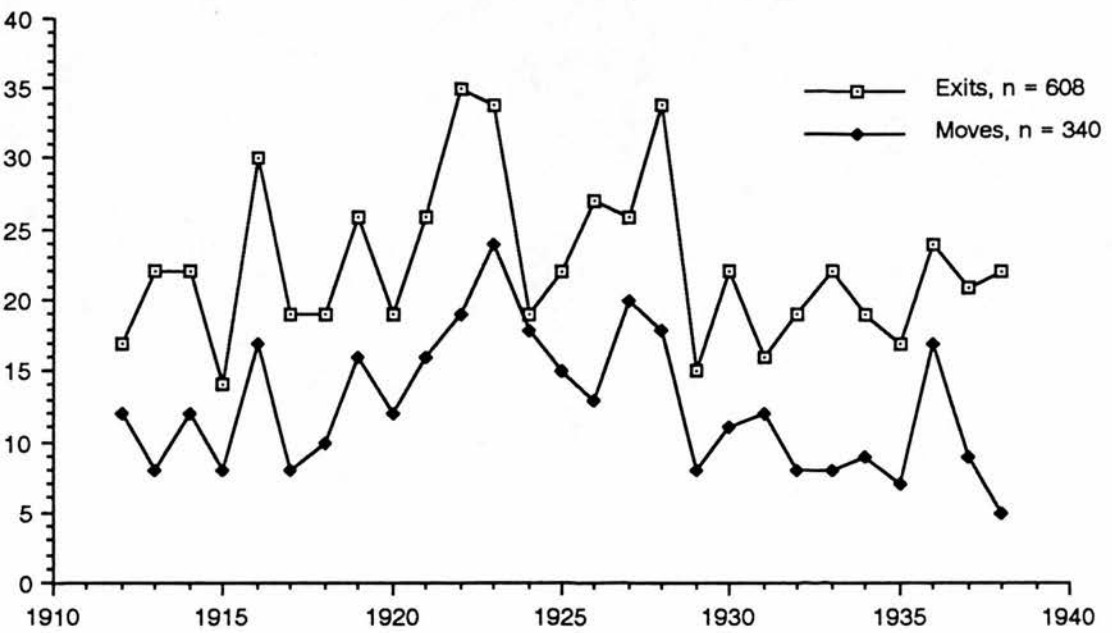
Worker quit rates from Dumfriesshire farms, 1912-1938



Source: Valuation Rolls, 1911/12-38/39

Graph 5

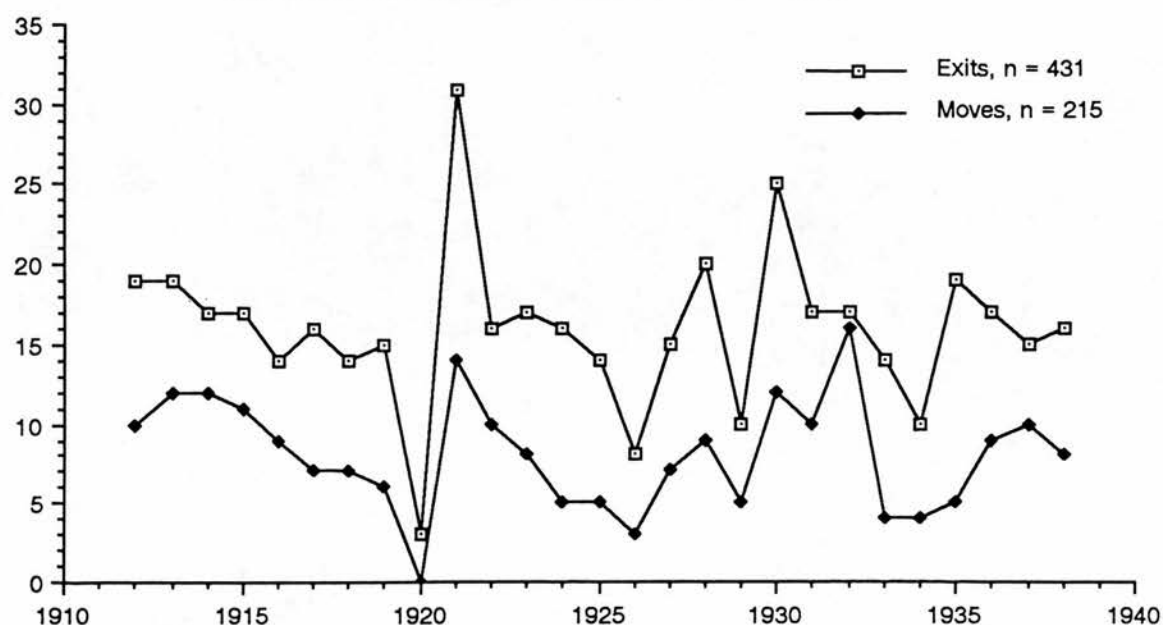
Number of 'Exits' and 'Moves' by farm workers in East Lothian, 1912-1938



Source: Letter cluster sample from Valuation Rolls, 1911/12-38/39

Graph 6

Number of 'Exits' and 'Moves' by farm workers in Dumfriesshire, 1912-1938



Source: Letter cluster sample from Valuation Rolls, 1911/12-38/39

This picture is further enhanced by evidence from the letter cluster samples of individual workers. Here the number of individual movements was counted for each year in the two counties. There were two possible ways of identifying movement. Firstly, if a worker was definitely recorded as moving from one farm to another within the county, this was identified as a MOVE. However, a worker could have sought employment on a farm outside the county or in another industry (leaving the sample), therefore these were added to the 'Moves' and counted as EXITS. This would also include anybody who had left the sample for any other reason such as sickness, death or retirement¹. The results are shown in Graphs 5 and 6.

The 'move' and 'exit' rates exhibit more discernible trends than the statistics for farm quits. For East Lothian note the peaks in 1922/3, and 1927/8, and a continual period of reduced activity throughout the 1930s. In Dumfries the troughs of 1920 and 1925/6 are confirmed, with high rates during the late 1920s/early 1930s, followed by some evidence of slump in the mid 1930s.

¹ The problem of identifying actual mobility in a sample of workers is also acknowledged by Southall, H., 'The tramping artisan revisits', p.282.

Detailed comment will not be made on the 1910s because the mobility rates were heavily influenced by wartime enlistment, but can mobility rates and the state of the labour market be linked as labour economists have suggested? The answer must be a qualified one; certainly mobility rates generally fell during the early to mid 1930s when the labour market was experiencing its greatest slump, and when unemployment was, for the first time, a possibility for many farm workers. The continued healthy state of the labour market throughout the 1920s is confirmed by the peaks in the latter part of the decade. Nevertheless, some fluctuations remain unanswered, particularly the massive slump in mobility during 1920 in Dumfries, and the general troughs in the mid 1920s. The peak in the early 1920s in East Lothian is almost certainly a function of the industrial relations position within the county, leading up to a major strike in 1923, which would have encouraged a large number of workers to switch employers¹.

Some contemporaries did identify the state of the labour market as a major factor in mobility. In fact evidence from nearby Northumberland suggested that mobility rates were in decline by the 1930s, though the reasons given there were not the Depression, but the impact of wage regulation south of the border, and the declining size of farm worker families². Therefore the conclusion must be that the reasons behind worker mobility are far more complex than a simple link between the amount of movement and the general state of the labour market.

Worker characteristics

One focus of attention for labour economists has been the impact on mobility rates of different worker characteristics, for example age and household composition³. Unfortunately, without access to the Population Census, it is impossible to gain systematic information on individual farm workers' ages and household structure. However, oral evidence points to higher rates of mobility amongst unmarried workers where they hired

¹ See chapter 8.

² *Royal Commission on housing of the industrial population in Scotland rural and urban. Evidence* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.1387, A.Reid, farm servant, East Lothian. On Northumberland see, Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects of farm labour in North Northumberland' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 4 (1937), p.303.

³ Ehrenberg, R.G. and Smith, R.S., *Modern labor economics*, pp.359-361.

separately, as in Dumfries¹. They were hired on six-monthly as opposed to annual contracts, providing them with two opportunities to change employers ever year (November and May), and it was, of course, much easier without the tie of a family for them to do so.

'The single man could shift about more than a married man. If it wasn't suiting him, he could just pack his bag and away.'²

The Valuation Rolls do break down farm workers into a number of basic occupational groups (cattlemen, orramen, ploughmen, grieves, shepherds, etc.), who retained different skills and positions in the labour hierarchy³. These occupations were well established, with a high degree of skill transferability between different farms, i.e. once a ploughman had learnt to work with horses he could utilise such an attribute on any farm. This made it easy for workers to change employers, a function of distinct, standardised, occupational labour markets⁴. Labour economic theory has concluded that those workers with higher levels of skill will have less tendency to change employers, and will therefore stay longer at any one place of employment.

'...to the extent that higher skill jobs involve more non-pecuniary as well as more pecuniary rewards, the higher skills a worker possesses the less likely it is that he will quit his current employment for any given wage difference. Non-pecuniary rewards are specific to the firm; workers become strongly attached to the non-pecuniary aspects of their own jobs and cannot easily transfer their attachment. Moreover, workers derive benefits from job stability itself, directly and, for skilled workers, indirectly through the status it confers....A number of arguments suggest that willingness to quit will be higher for unskilled than for skilled workers, particularly those with significant specific skills.'⁵

Tables 2 and 3 show the average length of stay on farms, by category of worker, for the approximately 440 workers in the letter cluster samples from the two counties. For all regular farm servants, the average length of

¹ In the mid-nineteenth century separate hiring of single workers in the south-east was common; Houston in his study of Greenlaw, Berwickshire for the 1830s-40s, found that the unmarried and the young had much higher mobility rates (Houston, R., 'Frequent flitting', pp.35-36).

² Interview Barber, also commented upon by Mr. Maxwell (worker).

³ See chapter 3.

⁴ Marsden, D., *The end of economic man? Custom and competition in labour markets* (Wheatsheaf, Brighton, 1986), pp.234-235.

⁵ Joll, C., McKenna, C., McNabb, R. and Shorey, J., *Developments in labour market analysis* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1983), p.171.

individual job duration was between three and four years, a figure confirmed by contemporary estimates¹.

Table 2: Worker job duration, by occupation, East Lothian, 1911/12-38/39

Occupation	Estimated numbers of workers in sample*	Number of employment observations in sample	Total number of worker years	Average duration (years)
Cattlemen	34	99	275	2.78
Orramen	32	74	208	2.81
Ploughmen	113	347	995	2.87
Grieves	22	41	254	6.20
Shepherds	12	21	145	6.90
ALL	213	582	1877	3.23

Table 3: Worker job duration, by occupation, Dumfriesshire, 1911/12-38/39

Occupation	Estimated number of workers in sample*	Number of employment observations in sample	Total number of worker years	Average duration (years)
Orramen	26	60	141	2.35
Ploughmen	100	268	830	3.10
Cattlemen	27	55	211	3.84
Dairymen	24	49	210	4.29
Foremen/ Managers	14	24	113	4.71
Shepherds	41	93	510	5.48
ALL	232	549	2015	3.67

Source: Letter cluster sample from valuation rolls

¹ *Report for the Board of Agriculture for Scotland by Sir James Wilson on farm-workers*, p.6; Duncan, J.F., 'The Scottish agricultural labourer' in D.T.Jones, J.F.Duncan, H.M.Conacher and W.R.Scott, *Rural Scotland during the War* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1926), p.191; *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1257, W.Barnie, tenant farmer, Selkirk.

* It was not possible to count the exact number of workers in each sample and categorise them by occupation for the following reasons:

- a) Some workers changed occupations over the period, and have been placed in the category in which they spent the longest time.
- b) Some workers had long intervening gaps between entries on the valuation roll, and, particularly with common surnames, it was difficult to tell if they were the same individual or not.

Those at the top of the occupational hierarchy (shepherds, grieves and managers, and dairymen), with the highest level of responsibility, tended to stay much longer on a farm (4-7 years). These three groups were directly responsible to farmers for particular sectors of production, and in the case of dairymen, and especially shepherds, were essentially allowed to operate as independent units by the farmer¹.

'[Experienced shepherds] and farm stewards remain for a long time on farms, and are as a rule averse to change. I heard of several herds who had been all their lives on the same farm, and whose sons were similarly engaged.... There are various reasons why herds seldom change.... shepherds get to know the peculiarities of a farm, and the suitability of this or that field to certain ages or classes of sheep. As they are left pretty much to themselves in the shifting and general management of the flock they become deeply interested in their welfare, and it is quite a common thing to hear a herd speak of "my ewes" or "my tups". They are consulted on all matters referring to buying or selling, and seldom fail to put in a word when a master is trying to make a deal with a butcher or jobber. In fact a shepherd becomes almost a fixture on a farm....'²

'Did shepherds and grieves tend to stay longer on a farm?

They did, very much longer; the grieves and shepherds stayed a long time.... They had more connection and more working with the farmer, they were more in contact with the farmer. The shepherd was always looking at his stock..to see if they were better this year than last.... The grievance was the same, just paying more interest.'³

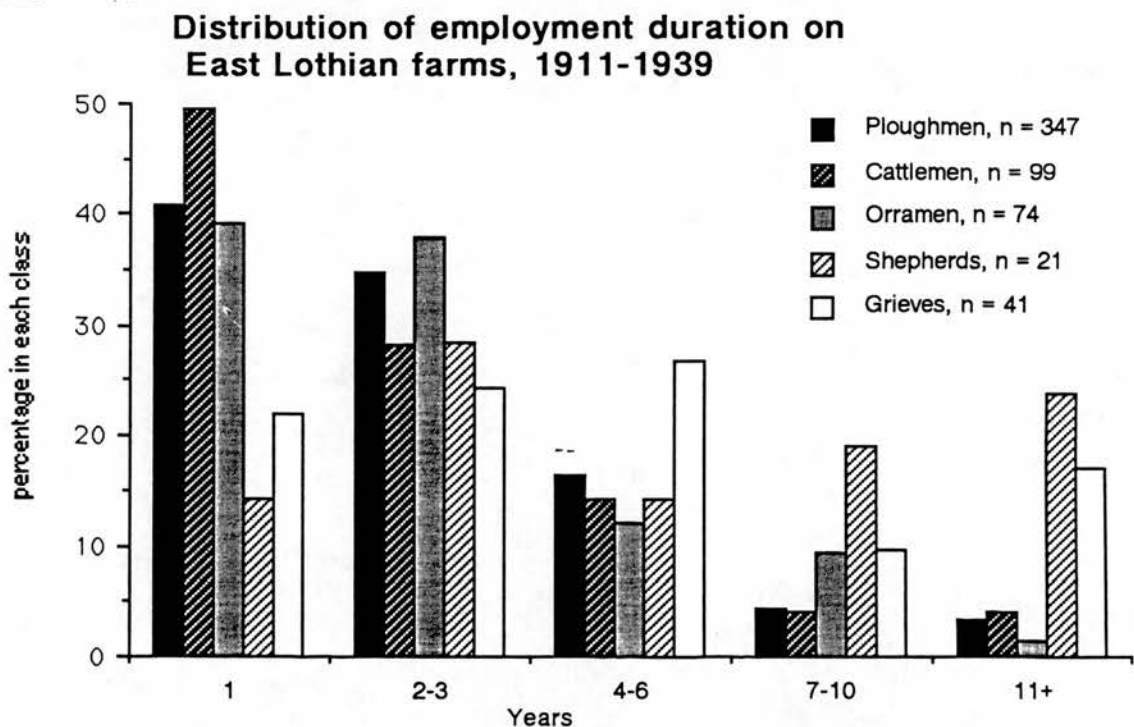
¹ See chapter 8. Interestingly this is opposite from the pattern observed today when skilled stockmen have the highest rates of mobility amongst farmworkers; Danziger, R., *Political powerlessness: agricultural workers in post-war England* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), p.70.

² *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, report on East and Midlothian, p.98; for Dumfries see BOAS, *Report on the Committee on women*, p.67, J.H.Milne Home, factor, Canonbie. In the 1950s in a study on Scottish rural society, Littlejohn reported a Department of Agriculture for Scotland finding that shepherds, on average, spent six years with each employer (Littlejohn, J., *Westrigg: the sociology of a Cheviot parish* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963), p.146 fn.).

³ Interview Drysdale; numerous other interviewees mentioned the low mobility rates of shepherds and grieves, particularly Messrs. Denholm, Leckie, Scott, Sykes and Trotter.

However, it must be remembered that grieves were disproportionately drawn from the older sections of the labour force, and therefore would tend to have lower mobility rates¹. The division of mobility experience between the different occupational categories was greater in East Lothian than in Dumfriesshire, a fact attributable to the larger average farm size (particularly in terms of individual workforces), which resulted in a more accentuated and established labour hierarchy.

Graph 7



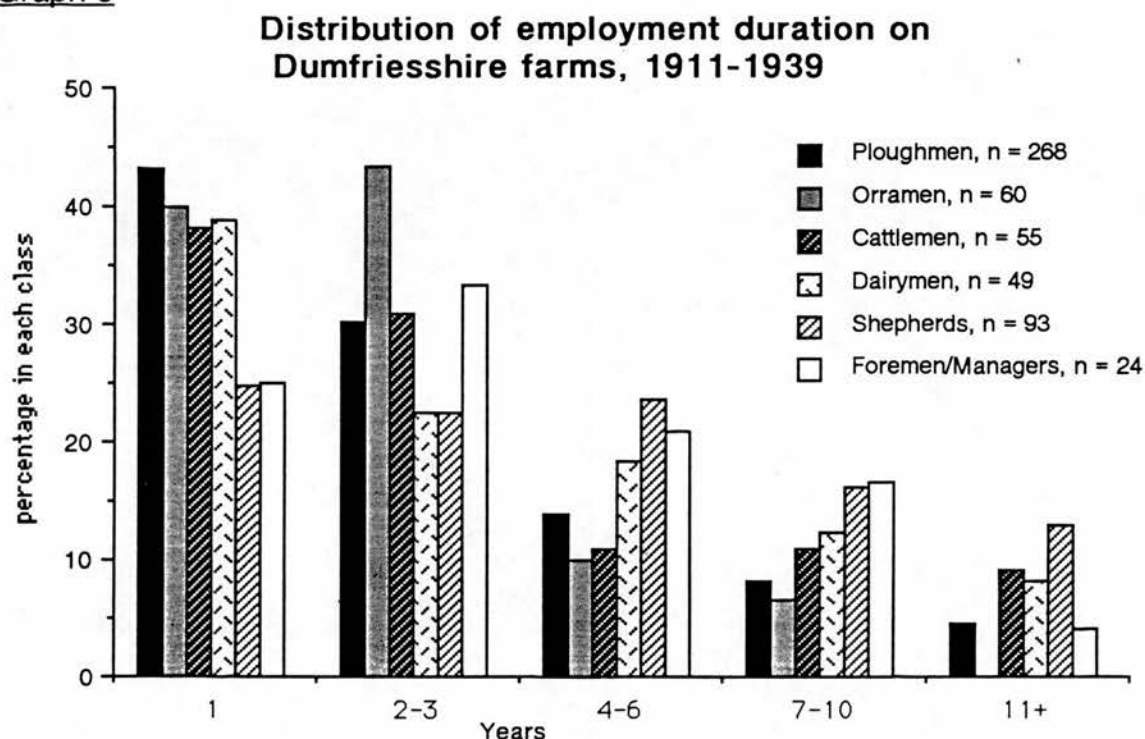
Source: Letter cluster sample from Valuation Rolls, 1911/12-38/39

On the other hand, it would be wrong to conclude that all grieves and shepherds stayed with their employers for long periods of time. Graphs 7 and 8 show the distribution of employment service across the occupational categories within the two counties. Both present a similar picture, workers in occupations with lesser degrees of responsibility (cattlemen, orramen and ploughmen), had the majority of their farm stays within the 1 and 2-3 year groupings. The more responsible workers experienced a smoother distribution across the groupings, and on many occasions they only spent 1-

¹ Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects', p.306; see chapter 3, Table 3 for the age structure of different worker categories.

3 years on a farm, this being balanced out by those who had more long-term stays.

Graph 8



Source: Letter cluster sample from Valuation Rolls, 1911/12-38/39

It is difficult to ascertain whether this was due to a life-cycle effect, i.e. workers moving around early on in their careers until they found somewhere to settle down, or whether it was merely a consequence of individual behaviour - did some workers just feel the need to change jobs very often, merely the desire not to stay too long in one place? Oral evidence certainly stresses the latter¹ and an examination of the mobility patterns of specific individuals also confirms this. In the cases of both shepherds and grieves there were workers who would stay on a single farm for long periods. Many grieves changed occupations (and at the same time farms) during their working lives to and from ploughmen and orramen, no doubt a function of the availability of work. Shepherds were unlikely to do this (shepherding was mainly an hereditary occupation²), though it seems that those who stayed for the shortest periods (1 year) were often only temporary, i.e. with

¹ See below.

² Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects', pp.310-311.

lower levels of skill and responsibility. The picture is further complicated by the fact that shepherds tended to have a wider mobility range, often taking them outwith the county, therefore a number arrived on East Lothian or Dumfries farms, stayed for 4-8 years and then moved to a farm in another county.

Clearly then, there was a direct relationship between levels of skill and responsibility, and mobility rates. However, much of the mobility was down to the personal characteristics of the worker, some individuals having a strong preference for regular moves.

'There was a man who came to East Barns....I mind his wife telling me - "I've been married for so many years and I've been at the same amount of places". He shifted every year.'¹

'Why did some workers move so much?

It was just that they had been used to that. Some of them would move without any reason, they had no row with anybody or anything like that, they just wanted a shift. Possibly [to] the neighbouring farm, or back two or three.'²

'Some people moved every year...they couldnae settle....It was just their own selves, they didn't need to. But it was just their own selves, they wanted to move around the country. A lot of people moved every year.'³

Employer attributes

The mobility of workers is not only governed by their own characteristics, but also by the attributes of their employers. A study of the relationship between employer characteristics and worker mobility is possible through the examination of the rates of labour turnover experienced on farms in the three selected parishes of Humble, Whitekirk and Applegarth.

The valuation roll does provide a limited amount of information about the farms. Firstly, it shows whether the farmer was a tenant or an owner-occupier. In 1935 25% of holdings were farmed by owner-occupiers in Humble, 44% in Whitekirk, and 17% in Applegarth. However, there appeared to be no link between this factor and levels of worker turnover.

¹ Interview Porteus.

² Interview Foggo.

³ Interview Main.

More important is the possible connection between mobility and farm size. Labour economists have established that the size of production unit is inversely correlated with labour turnover, for a number of possible reasons; larger firms tend to pay better wages which reduces the temptation for workers to leave, there are greater opportunities for internal promotion, and they prefer to recruit workers with a history of reliability and employment stability because the costs of supervision, and therefore the likelihood of workers' shirking, are greater¹.

This hypothesis was tested in a number of studies on agriculture during the early 1970s. The National Economic Development Office found, in a survey of 3940 holdings throughout England and Wales, that there was a definite statistical link between holding size (in terms of acreage and size of workforce) and the likelihood of workers having stayed on a certain farm since their entry into the industry². A more detailed examination of 100 farms in East Anglia by Gasson also concluded that such a relationship existed. As well as the reasons cited above, she found that smaller farms tended to employ younger (and cheaper) workers, who, because of their age, had higher rates of mobility³.

The valuation roll sample provides information on the size of unit, in terms of its valuation for rates. This was directly based on the annual rental value⁴. There is no information on the size of workforce on the farms (except the number of cottages, but each cottage could have supplied a varied number of workers depending on household composition). Annual rental value is a better indicator of labour force size than acreage, since 100 acres of permanent pasture and 100 acres of root crops would clearly require very different levels of labour input. The average annual valuations of individual farms employing labour varied from £64 to £1513 in the two East Lothian parishes, and from £119 to £484 in Applegarth. A Pearson's correlation test was run for the two counties and the results did not support the hypothesis that turnover and farm size were inversely related (Humbie and Whitekirk, R

¹ Ehrenberg, R.G. and Smith, R.S., *Modern labor economics*, pp.369-370.

² National Economic Development Office, *Agricultural manpower in England and Wales* (HMSO, London, 1972), pp.67-69.

³ Gasson, R., 'Turnover and size of labour force on farms' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 25 (1974), pp.115-127.

⁴ Guest, C.W.G., *The law of valuation in Scotland* (William Hodge & Co., Edinburgh, 1930), pp.54-55. Although farms were increasingly de-rated, they were still required to provide a full valuation on the valuation roll.

= +0.225; Applegarth, R = +0.009). So why did the average length of worker stay on individual farms vary from 1.8 to 8.0 years?

The answer lies in qualitative, unmeasurable factors, and therefore cannot be statistically proven. As noted in Chapter 6, some farms had 'good' reputations and others 'bad', whether it be for houses, horses, condition of livestock, or the personality of the farmer or grieve¹. Farmer and farm did not always amount to the same thing because most of the selected holdings in the samples experienced at least one change in occupier over the period (on the 51 holdings examined there were 91 farmers between 1911 and 1939²).

A worker, who found himself on a farm where conditions were poor, or who was forced to take a job on a farm that was known to be a 'bad' choice, would soon leave. This was the cost to the farmer of failing to fully conform to the implicit contract, a fact confirmed by both contemporary comment and oral evidence:

'I found the love of changing from farm to farm as fashionable in one district as another. Even married men with large families throw up good situations for no fault or dislike but just because they want a change. I found in every district some farms peculiarly subject to flitting while on others the duration of service was long. No doubt some masters and farm stewards have a nicer way of taking and treating their men than others.'³

'It benefited the farmer to have good houses for his workers, because they wouldnae settle if they were bad houses, they just cleared out.'

'Did most of the workers move around quite a lot?'

No, not all. The bad farmers, they didnae stay with them, they were always moaning about their work, they didnae stay with them.'⁴

¹ Houston undertook a similar examination of farm size and turnover and found no correlation; Houston, R., "Frequent flitting", p.41.

² In 1945 the Department of Agriculture estimated that the average length of farmer occupation was 19.9 years on rented farms and 23.4 years for owner-occupiers [DOAS, *Scottish farm rents and estate expenditure* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1948), p.24].

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, summary report on the Lothians and Fife, p.12; for the impact of varying housing conditions see Scottish Land Enquiry Committee, *Scottish land. The report of the Scottish land enquiry committee* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1914), pp.217-220.

⁴ Interview Heard.

Why did farm servants move?

As noted earlier in this chapter, there were many reasons for farm servants changing jobs. So far the focus has been on large groups of workers and employers, in an effort to ascertain what the broad parameters for mobility were. However, the decision to move remained an individual one, and therefore the individual motivation for mobility also requires examination. Some of the causes of worker movement will not be surprising, but others were specific to Scottish agriculture and its continued insistence on fixed long-term contracts with specific end-dates¹.

The factor that received most attention from the oral history interviewees was wages, a farm servant would be loath to receive a pay cut or freeze while others saw their pay rise.

'A shilling was a lot then, you'd shift for 6d. a week. I've kent a man, there were 6d. between the farmer and him, the farmer wouldnae give in and the man wouldnae give in, and he just left. Oh aye, [you] thought nothing about shifting, [it] didn't take much to shift you.'²

'Take some of the finest farms in the Lothians; you find them haggling with the men over a sixpence or a shilling, and letting men leave to go for a sixpence of an increase to another farmer....I can point to many experienced men going to get an extra sixpence. There are cases in the Lauder district, in Berwick, where they are even moving twenty miles to get an extra sixpence a week after being with the farmer for five or six years.'³

Once wages were set by the Wages Board from 1938, then the question of the level of pay increases was increasingly taken out of the hands of individual employers and farmers, thus reducing the incentive to move to another farm⁴.

Some of the shifting on the basis of wages was connected to the expectation of promotion, or gaining new experience⁵. This was particularly

¹ Reasons behind the mobility of farm workers in the Borders are discussed in Robertson, B.W., 'The Border farm worker 1871-1971: industrial attitudes and behaviour' *Journal of Agricultural Labour Science*, 2 (1973), pp.77-81.

² Interview Trotter; also mentioned specifically by Foggo, Denholm, Douglas, Raeburn, Smart, Black, Leckie, Main, Scott and Lawrie.

³ *Second report of the Departmental Committee on Food Production in Scotland, evidence* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1916), p.128, J.G.Robertson, Organising Secretary, SFSU. Even during the 1930s, a period of falling wages, farm workers generally did not wish to stay on a farm when offered a cut in pay (*Report of the Committee on farm workers*, p.12).

⁴ See chapter 8; Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects', p.301.

⁵ Mr. Hamilton's father moved in the 1900s to gain experience in the operation of a steam engine and threshing mill (Interview Hamilton).

important for single workers who hired separately as in Dumfries. A lad of 14 would start with the 'odd' horse (a single horse used for odd jobs around the farm, especially carting), and then gradually progress up the hierarchy of ploughmen, with associated increments in pay¹.

Those who hired under the family hiring system, notably in East Lothian, were more limited in their mobility by the general demands of the family, especially the head of household. However, since all households would attempt to maximise their earnings, it would not be in the interest of a worker to stay on a farm that could not offer continual employment to all family members. The life cycle experience of child-bearing, adolescence, and then children leaving home to establish their own households, ensured a continual fluctuation in the supply of labour. Similarly the requirement for adequate schooling for children within walking distance was mentioned by a number of interviewees as a reason for moving.

'Quite frequently the workers have no option. A boy or girl may be leaving school for whom employment must be found. If the parents wish to keep the boy or girl at home they have to find a place where the farmer is willing to give the necessary situation....It may be that some other workers on the farm are removing, and the farmer may not be able to get all the workers he requires in one family, so that he has to let another family on the farm go, to give him a better opportunity of securing the workers required having both places open.'²

As noted in chapter 6, workers with additional family workers were actually at an advantage in the labour market, since farmers were keen to maximise the labour supply from their limited housing resources.

Conditions on the farm were also very important to the workers, and much of this can be linked into the enforcement of implicit contracts, of particular importance was the condition of housing. However, the relationship between the worker and employer, and between the workers also could have a noticeable impact of mobility decisions; as one interviewee commented, 'If

¹ Mr. Scott was a particularly active example of this, shifting on a regular basis as a young man and rarely staying more than two years on a farm. At one point he moved merely because he felt he was getting too old for his present job, and there was another younger lad keen to take over (Mr. Scott was 18 at the time). See also Kussmaul, A., 'The ambiguous mobility', p.226; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, p.152.

² Duncan, J.F., 'The Scottish agricultural labourer', p.191; life-cycle mobility was specifically mentioned by the following interviewees: family labour - Lawrie Leckie, Smart, Black; schools - Trotter, Bell.

you hadnae a decent employer, well, move on, that was a simple solution.¹ Relations on the farm will form the focus of chapter 8, and for the moment it will suffice to say that given the close proximity in which employers, workers and families found themselves, differences were bound to arise.

'Why was there so much flitting?

Possibly the neighbours, possibly the gaffer [grieve], possibly the farmer, possibly the horses. Maybe the horses came first if they didnae have a good pair of horse, or the harness wasn't up to scratch.'²

On larger farms the position and behaviour of the grieve was important³. In his study of the north-east of Scotland, Carter claimed that the occurrence of a 'clean toon', when all the workers left at the same time as the grieve/foreman, was a consequence of the workers' need to protect the grieve or foreman in his negotiations with the farmer over the pattern and intensity of work⁴. However, such an activity was strictly limited to the North-East, and did not occur in other parts of rural Scotland (not one of my interviewees mentioned it). In fact Carter's hypothesis is based on limited source material, and if it was meant to protect the foreman against an unscrupulous farmer then why did it not occur elsewhere⁵. The probable answer lies in the strength of peasant culture that was retained in the north-east and the resulting attitudes towards employment relations, attitudes which were not replicated in other areas of lowland Scotland⁶.

Important in facilitating the continued mobility of farm workers, which formed the basis of contractual enforcement, were the specific conditions under which the workers were hired. The contractual termination dates of

¹ Interview Maxwell (worker). See also Jamieson, L. and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns: growing up 1900-1930* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992), p.139.

² Interview Denholm.

³ See chapter 8.

⁴ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), pp.152-154.

⁵ Carter uses evidence from William Alexander, a nineteenth century north-east writer who had previously been a farm servant, and John Reid (alias David Toulmin), a retired farm servant and writer (Carter, I., *Farmlife*, pp.153 fn.74 and 75; *idem*, 'To roose the countra fae the caul' morality o' a deid moderatism': William Alexander and Johnny Gibb of Gushneuk' *Northern Scotland*, 2 (1976-77), p.160). Although both Alexander and Reid identify the existence of the 'clean toon', neither link it, as Carter does, with the social relations between the farmer and the foreman.

⁶ The relationship between the dual existence of a peasantry and a capitalist labour force in the north-east in the period 1840-1914 forms the basis for the whole of Carter's book (*Farmlife*).

28th May or 28th November meant that a farm worker had only one, or sometimes two, opportunities to move legally each year. For workers the difficult decision was either to stay another year, or to move to another farm. This in itself encouraged mobility, since both employers and employees were under considerable social and psychological pressure at the time, and unless there was the distinct possibility of unemployment (a rare experience for farm servants prior to the 1930s), the temptation was always to take a risk and move to improve pay and conditions.

'A man may have trouble with his employer at some time during his engagement, or his wife have trouble with the next-door neighbour, or the children may quarrel, and that is sufficient to revise the temper of some of them; if they have one or two of these domestic troubles during the twelve months, then that is sufficient to make the man make up his mind that he will move although everything else is quite correct. Now if he had an opportunity of staying on for a fortnight or a month, he might remain, but when the hiring time comes he is in that unsettled state that he would not risk staying on, and he throws the job up and goes to the market and gets another job.... You will find that when the hiring time comes round the men get into a state of uncertainty as to whether they are to be employed or not, and the employers also get into a state of uncertainty as to whether they are to get men or not, the result being that very often they move when they would not have done otherwise.'¹

'Some of them [the workers] moved every year, they were shifting. Others wasnae so bad, but the majority flitted in these days. I think the main reason was that they were tied down from one year's end to the other, because after they went to the monthly engagements, the farm workers settled down and hardly shifted after that, cause they knew they could get away within a month.'²

In addition, when a worker changed jobs, the new employer always paid for the provision of transport to move the family and household belongings (the farmer usually sent a number of carts to the previous place of residence, though motor lorries were increasingly used during the interwar period). Given that regular farmworkers were accommodated in tied housing, a new home always came with a new job. And since 'flitting' always occurred on the same days once or twice a year, there was little disruption to work and to income received. Therefore the cost of mobility to the worker was very low.

¹ *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1381, J.Rothney, General Secretary, SFSU.

² Interview Leckie; after the Second World War (during which time farm workers were prevented from changing employers without going through an official tribunal) the government introduced regulations that ended the long-term engagements and all farm workers were employed on the basis of a month's notice.

'It must be remembered that the expense of flitting falls on the employer. The farmer to whom the labourer is engaged "flits" him; that is to say, he sends carts to transfer the furniture from house to house. Moreover, the hind being a yearly servant, is paid the same when flitting as when working. If farm servants had to flit themselves, finding their own carts and paying for their services, I reckon the fashion would change.'¹

'Who paid for flitting the worker?

It was the farmer who paid, always. It was probably why the workers shifted [so much].'²

¹ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, report on East and Midlothian, p.98.

² Interview Black. All interviewees confirmed that the new employer paid for moving a worker and his family from their previous place of employment.

Mobility and the labour market

When dealing with farmers and workers as collective groups it is possible to identify certain trends. The state of the labour market did have some impact on mobility rates, but the relationship is far from clear, certainly not as definite as labour economists predict. However, there is greater support for the economic theorists when worker characteristics (skill and responsibility) are considered; here there was a definite link, with the most responsible workers staying on individual farms the longest. Nevertheless, the available data on individual employer characteristics refutes any theoretical relationship between size of production unit and rates of worker turnover. The issue of varied quit rates on farms turns on the unquantifiable attributes of specific farms and employers, whether they treated their workers well, if they provided decent housing and horses, how far they fulfilled the implicit contract. The cost to an employer who had a 'bad' reputation was clear, he attracted the less reliable workers, who would be keen to leave as soon as possible. Although many of the skills required in farming were transferable, some were not, notably the knowledge of the condition of a flock or herd, of the temperament of certain horses, and of the layout of a farm (firm-specific, as opposed to general, human capital¹).

To enforce reputations through mobility, the efficient provision of information concerning individual actors within the labour market remained essential. It has been argued in chapter six that both workers and employers had cheap, relatively reliable sources of information available to them. Accurate knowledge within a rural community generally requires limited geographical mobility, therefore how far did farm workers tend to move? In mid-nineteenth century Greenlaw (Berwickshire), Houston found that 95% of moves by farm workers were from less than 20 miles away, and 30% were from contiguous parishes². Similarly Carter in studying the North-East in the period 1840-1914, also concluded that farm servant mobility was limited in its geographical extent.

'Observers from outside the farming industry inveighed against the nomadic habits of farm servants throughout the period. It is undeniable that unmarried male farm servants rarely stayed at any farm for more than one six-month fee. Married men stayed longer, but here again the roads would

¹ Fallon, P. and Verry, D., *The economics of labour markets* (Philip Allan, Oxford, 1988), pp.142-146.

² Houston, R., "Frequent flitting", p.37.

be crowded on the annual cottar term-day with farm waggons carrying the cottar's belongings and families to new farms. But this frequent flitting did not mean, as many observers asserted, that farm servants put down no roots in the course of their wanderings. The most remarkable feature of farm servant mobility, apart from its frequency, was the narrowly circumscribed limits of that mobility.¹

Generally this remained true for lowland Scotland during the years 1900-39, and most of the workers interviewed remained on farms in East Lothian or Dumfries prior to the 1940s. Out of the 13 workers interviewed from East Lothian, nine spent their pre-1939 working lives within the county; for Dumfries the numbers were seven out of ten². However, three out of the four shepherds, who were interviewed, exhibited substantial geographical mobility, often transcending county boundaries; for example, Mr. Heard worked in Roxburghshire, Lanarkshire, Midlothian, Peebleshire and Perthshire prior to 1940, and Mr. Sykes in Argyllshire and Dumfriesshire. Therefore the recruitment area of shepherds was much wider. Substantial moves by other classes of workers were also possible; for example, Mr. Leckie's father (ploughman/grieve) worked in Wigtownshire and Dumfriesshire before migrating to East Lothian, and Mr. McIntyre (a dairyman) worked in Lanarkshire, Dumbartonshire, Dumfriesshire, and Kirkcudbrightshire. Long distance mobility was facilitated by the increasing penetration of rural areas by effective transport networks (road and rail), and the growing use of national newspapers as a method of recruitment, particularly the *Scottish Farmer*³. Such moves for most workers were exceptional, and the general pattern was to stick to the local area. Moving to an unknown employer in a new area was a risky scenario for any worker to undertake.

'I don't think they wanted to go out of the district, you wanted just to keep in that area, if there was a place suitable. The Dunbar hiring was for the east, and Haddington for [the rest of] East Lothian, and Dalkeith [for further west]. They did move, but you would find if the Dunbar people came this way, in a year or so they would go back; they couldnae settle, they had their own areas.'⁴

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife*, p.142; also commented upon in studies of farm service in England; Kussmaul, A., *Servants in husbandry*, p.69; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, pp.40-41

² The position after the Second World War is complicated because the hiring and contractual systems were significantly altered, which combined with a dramatic improvement in transport systems, had a significant potential impact on mobility patterns. This thesis is only concerned with labour market operations prior to 1939.

³ See chapter 6.

⁴ Interview Mrs. Main.

'How far did the workers tend to shift?

Oh, I think they would mostly stay in the area that they were in because it wasnae so handy shifting 60 miles, because there was nae motor transport to take them. A man couldn't be here [Dumfriesshire] and apply for a job in Ayrshire.'¹

In the only other systematic study of farm servant mobility during the early twentieth century, Henderson concluded that most migration was local².

Therefore the local nature of worker mobility established for nineteenth century Scottish agriculture remained in place. This is not surprising given that most recruitment was still undertaken through local media (hiring fairs, local newspapers, personal contacts); and although the bicycle enabled farm servants to increase their areas of contact and knowledge, their potential employment horizon remained limited. An East Lothian farm servant being interviewed by the Royal Commission on Housing just prior to the First World War reckoned that the distance of worker moves averaged 5-6 miles and were rarely beyond 18-20³. There is no evidence to suggest that this changed over the period under investigation, and therefore workers maintained a keen sense of local identity and knowledge, without which the contractual enforcement system based on reputations would have broken down⁴.

¹ Interview Maxwell (worker).

² Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects', p.302. Henderson's work was on Glendale in Northumberland, which although not in Scotland, was the only other county in Britain that exhibited the same hiring and recruitment patterns as in southern Scotland.

³ *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1387, A.Reid, farm servant, East Lothian.

⁴ In the only other oral history study of rural lowland Scotland, Jamieson and Toynbee made the following conclusion:

'High residential mobility among some kinds of agricultural labourers could result in considerable change in personnel from one year to the next. Mobility was often very local, however, with little likelihood of the newcomer ever feeling like a stranger, especially when similarities of interest, values and life experiences are considered. There were cases among our interviewees where other kin were present either on the farm on which the father was working, or nearby - at least at some stage during the life-cycle.'

Jamieson, L and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns*, p.82.

Chapter 8: Workers and farmers: a study in social relations

In previous chapters the focus has been upon the 'economics' of behaviour in the labour market; however, it is important to understand that paid employment involves social relations, between workers and employers, workers and workers, individuals and the community, and individuals and institutions. The values that govern these relationships are socially-constructed, and in recognition of this there has developed a sociological approach to the study of the history of employment¹. In providing an interdisciplinary approach to an analysis of the labour market, this chapter intends to focus upon the role of social relations in the workplace, analysing the behaviour of both groups of major actors, employees and employers.

'The competitive and collective behaviour of employer and employed within the labour market is...heavily influenced and circumscribed not only by their immediate relation to the labour process, but also by the social context in which they live. If we think of the community in terms of mutual responsibilities with moral obligation as the foundation of relationships, networks and forms of association, then it is hard to see how contesting groups or individuals and their practices in the job market can be free of such values.'²

Agricultural labour is a group that has received considerable attention from sociologists, who have been eager to try and explain why farm workers have remained consistently low-paid and collectively inactive, with all the outward signs of deference towards their employers and social 'betters'. The leading proponent of the sociological approach to the study of the agricultural labour market has been Howard Newby, who concluded that economists have failed to explain adequately the poor remuneration of farm workers. Instead of concentrating on the economics of the market for agricultural products (and the resulting low returns to farmers), Newby argued that a wider view of the socio-economic position of the farm worker was required³.

¹ Joyce, P., 'The historical meanings of work: an introduction' in P.Joyce (ed.), *The historical meanings of work* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), pp.1-30.

² Whipp, R., 'Labour markets and communities: an historical view' *Sociological Review*, 33 (1985), p.784.

³ Newby, H., 'The low earnings of agricultural workers: a sociological approach' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 23 (1972), pp.15-24.

Newby's work on agricultural workers has been extensive, and only a broad overview will be attempted here¹. The importance of Newby is the analytical framework he provided for the study of farm employment, particularly his understanding of the relationship between farmer and worker. The real impetus for his study came from Lockwood, who had argued that the agricultural worker should be the 'deferential' worker *par excellence*². Newby was primarily interested in two major theoretical problems; firstly, what exactly is 'deference', and secondly, what are the basic parameters that result in the emergence and sustenance of a deferential relationship?

Initially, Newby claimed that deference was a set of attitudes, rather than a form of behaviour, the latter being rejected because "deferential' behaviour - like bowing, curtsying, saluting, touching the forelock, etc. - take on a ritualistic form, emptied of all meaning, or may be enforced by sanctions surrounding the role of the individual concerned which make explanations of his behaviour in terms of 'deference' redundant'³. However, the inability to discover consistently 'deferential attitudes' amongst farm workers, both past and present, led him to conclude that a concentration on attitudes could result in over-simplified statements on social beliefs, and his perspective shifted towards examining 'deferential interaction'.

'The largest proportion of agricultural workers...had no coherent image of society and so could not be considered as adhering to any consistent set of attitudes. This emphasises the fact that we need to move away from a consideration of deferential (or, proletarian, etc.) *people* to a consideration of deferential *relationships*. We need to move away from investigating the attributes ('attitudes') of individual agricultural workers to an examination of the questions, 'to whom (if anyone) do they defer, and over what issues?' In this way attention is paid to both the deferential actor in this relationship and

¹ Newby at first concentrated on farm workers; Bell, C. and Newby, H., 'The sources of variation in agricultural workers' images of society' *Sociological Review*, 21 (1973), pp.229-253; Newby, H., 'The low earnings of agricultural workers'; 'Agricultural workers in the class structure' *Sociological Review*, 20 (1972), pp.413-439; 'The changing sociological environment of the farm' *Farm Management*, 2 (1974), pp.474-487; 'Deference and the agricultural worker' *Sociological Review*, 23 (1975), pp.51-60; *The deferential worker: a study of farm workers in East Anglia* (Penguin Education, London, 1979, first published in 1977). Later on his work was incorporated into a wider study of the sociology of British agriculture; Bell, C. and Newby, H., 'Capitalist farmers in the British class structure' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 14 (1974), pp.86-107; Newby, H., Bell, C., Rose, D. and Saunders, P., *Property, paternalism and power: class and control in rural England* (Hutchison, London, 1978).

² Newby, H., 'Agricultural workers in the class structure', pp.414-415.

³ Bell, C. and Newby, H., 'The sources of variation', p.232.

to the object of deference, placing their interaction in a particular situational context in which the relationship occurs.'¹

The particular situational context in which deferential interaction occurred was the result of three interactive levels; 'social', 'work' and 'market'. The 'market' situation was the position of the worker relative to wider employment and social opportunities, and because Newby was examining one occupational group within a particular locality (farm workers in East Anglia during the 1970s) he considered the 'market' situation to be a fixed constant for his study. Though he did accept that if the market situation were altered, then the workers' image of society might also change². Local variations within the work and social situations could produce variations in deferential interaction. The 'social' situation focuses upon relationships within the local community with three basic types; 'Occupational' - large, concentrated communities (villages) where farm workers tended to interact mainly with other farm workers, and where employers dominated the local social hierarchy; 'Encapsulated' - farm workers are surrounded by socio-economic groups who have little knowledge of rural matters, and all agriculturalists (farmers and workers) develop one social network; and 'Farm' - workers live at their place of employment and are physically and socially isolated from the rest of the community. For the 'Work' situation there were two possible variations; 'Bureaucratic' - little or no contact between employer and worker and formal rules of employment; and 'Non-bureaucratic' - where employer and worker interact on a continual basis at a face-to-face level. In 'non-bureaucratic, farm' situations deferential views would prevail, whilst in 'bureaucratic, occupational' situations deferential views would not prevail; in all other situations the position would be one of *ambivalence*, i.e. there is some evidence of deferential interaction, but workers do not have a coherent or convincing view of society that would firmly establish them as 'deferential' workers³. The occurrence of even a limited amount of deferential interaction ensures that the hierarchical social structure that is in place is legitimated and remains moderately stable; and the existence of deferential interaction prevents conflict between workers and employers occurring on a regular basis, implying successful 'tension

¹ Newby, H., 'Deference and the agricultural worker', p.53. For a fuller examination of deference see Newby, H., 'The deferential dialectic' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17 (1975), pp.139-164.

² Newby, H., 'Deference and the agricultural worker', pp.55-56.

³ Bell, C. and Newby, H., 'The sources of variation'.

management' by employers¹. To maintain such a relationship employers have certain 'obligations' placed upon them, usually referred to as 'paternalism'. Paternalism is at its most effective where the workers are in a position of 'powerlessness' and 'dependence'².

Outwardly, the success of the deferential dialectic is demonstrated in the lack of action taken by workers to challenge the legitimacy of the prevalent social structure, and this is what has made such a concept so appealing to studies of modern agricultural labour. The problem is that historically farm workers have been more active in their pursuance of 'class conflict'³. A number of historians have stressed the potential for labour disputes, and the ability of farm workers to act against their employers, overtly and covertly, and collectively and individually. The first attack on the Newby approach came from a study of farm servants in late nineteenth century north-east Scotland⁴. The criticisms were successfully rebuffed by Newby, who argued that historically the market position of farm workers was different from his study⁵. However the critic, Carter, continued his analysis of the reasons behind the lack of deferential attitudes demonstrated by farm servants. These farm workers were in a market situation where there was a consistent level of demand for their skilled labour, and the labour market reputations of employers were just as important as those of the workers. A number of informal institutions (the 'clean toon' and the 'Horseman's Word') ensured that the workers could act in a collective manner in their negotiations with the farmer if they so wished; and in any case the dominant culture of the community was one of the small peasant-farmer, from whose households many of the farm servants came. All these factors ensured a more evenly-balanced relationship where deviant behaviour contrary to socially-acceptable norms could be subject to sanction through the collective knowledge of reputations at the hiring fairs.

¹ Newby, H., 'The deferential dialectic', pp.146-149.

² Danziger, R., *Political powerlessness: agricultural workers in post-war England* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), pp.87-89; Warde, A., 'Conditions of dependence: working-class quiescence in Lancaster in the twentieth century' *International Review of Social History*, 35 (1990), pp.71-105.

³ Hobsbawm, E.J. and Rudé, G., *Captain Swing* (Penguin, London, 1973, first published 1969); Dunbabin, J.P.D., *Rural discontent in nineteenth-century Britain* (Faber and Faber, London, 1974).

⁴ Carter, I., 'Agricultural workers in the class structure: a critical note' *Sociological Review*, 22 (1974), pp.271-279.

⁵ Newby, H., 'Deference and the agricultural worker'.

'We may conclude that north-east farm servants showed few signs of deferential attitudes as defined by Lockwood and Newby because of the heavy constraints of a peasant culture whose stereotyped hero was a crofter or small farmer who acted in accordance with culturally defined customary expectations. The large farmer was never accepted to be *ipso facto* more admirable than the small farmer; why, then, should farm servants - a large proportion of whom sprang from crofting or small farming stock - defer to him? Lockwood's argument does not hold in the north-east for a paradoxical reason; it was the overwhelmingly importance of interactional status in the area that *prevented* the emergence of deferential traditionalism among farm servants.'¹

This is an argument that Newby would be happy to accept, given that the particular historical situation that it is drawn from is economically, socially and culturally different from modern, rural East Anglia². However, others have argued that the very nature of the organisation of agricultural production and the structure of the agricultural industry, was bound to ensure a situation of endemic conflict between farmers and workers. Howkins, in particular, has concluded, from an overtly Marxist viewpoint, that relations of production were clearly exploitative, and this, combined with substantial seasonal fluctuations in the demand for labour, ensured that disputes were commonplace.

'Relationships between master and man on the farms of Norfolk in the period 1870-1925 were exploitative. This currently unfashionable notion means simply that in pre-mechanised but capitalist agriculture, labour is the main source of value, and that the labourers were consistently underpaid for the production of that value. Thus the workplace was the scene of constant potential conflict. Again, put simply, it was in the interest of the master to get as much work done for as little as possible; in the interest of the labourer to do as little work for as much as possible.... If we ignore the *fact* of exploitation what is, as Howard Newby points out, the delicate balance of a deferential relationship is elevated to a permanent and harmonious reality.'³

¹ Carter, I., 'Class and culture among farm servants in the north-east, 1840-1914' in A.A. MacLaren (ed.), *Social class in Scotland: past and present* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1976), p.121.

² Newby actually described Carter's paper ('Class and culture') as 'an outstanding example of oral history methods brought successfully to bear on a sociological problem'; 'Deference and the agricultural worker', p.55.

³ Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men: rural radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985), p.15. See also his article, 'Structural conflict and the farmworker: Norfolk, 1900-1920' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 4 (1977), pp.217-229. The importance of class, in the Marxist sense, to agrarian social relations has been discussed by Clark with reference to Ireland; Clark, S., 'The importance of agrarian classes: agrarian class structure and

Howkins, and others, have further argued that rural historians have previously ignored conflict within the workplace because of the failure of farm workers to establish formal collective institutions such as trade unions¹. Nor is this view restricted to studies of capitalist arable farming in the south and east of England. In a recent study of Wales (an area noted for smaller, family farms with a more enhanced role for livestock production), Pretty has reiterated many of the above points, stressing the fundamental economic distinction between farmer and worker, and the likelihood of conflict resulting from exploitation within the workplace².

More recently, Snell has returned to the topic of rural class relations in the south and east of England, claiming that deferential actions by farmworkers were merely a protective facade, and that their real views were ones of 'deferential bitterness' combined with a fatal acceptance of the inevitability of their socio-economic position.

'Deference...cannot be taken at more than its face value and semblance; for that, after all, is all labourers intended of it. Nor is it really worthwhile throwing up a theoretical smokescreen around the word, if this obscures the feelings at stake. Deferential attitudes became a manner, one side of an habitual double-faced outlook, a form of self-preservation. They were buttoned in as a necessity for survival, insisted upon by vulnerable parents from an early age, parents who despaired at gross and often capricious landed power, who felt themselves without the slightest influence to change a seemingly immutable social structure. However...deference often covered a deep-rooted sense of grievance, of social bitterness, which had to be censored because of the very precarious circumstances of livelihood.'³

Critically, with reference to circumstances elsewhere in Britain, Snell claimed that the deterioration in rural class relations could be directly linked to the decline of farm service in the south, and that relations on the smaller, northern farms were more cordial⁴.

collective action in nineteenth-century Ireland' *British Journal of Sociology*, 29 (1978), pp.22-40.

¹ Reed, M., 'Social change and social conflict in nineteenth-century England: a comment' in M.Reed and R.Wells (eds.), *Class, conflict and protest in the English countryside, 1700-1880* (Frank Cass, London, 1990), p.102.

² Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed: farm workers' trade unions in Wales, 1889-1950* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1989), pp.xii and 2.

³ Snell, K.D.M., 'Deferential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England and Wales' in M.L.Bush (ed.), *Social orders and social classes in Europe since 1500: studies in social stratification* (Longman, London, 1992), p.165.

⁴ *ibid*, p.167.

Where does this leave the study of agricultural employment relations? The focus clearly is upon the factors which govern the workplace behaviour of employers and workers. The Marxist viewpoint places the nature of production in the ascendancy, stressing the inevitability of conflict that arises from placing the controller of the means of production and the proletariat in such close proximity (an inevitable consequence of the face-to-face relationships that farming usually entails¹). However, the Weberian approach of Newby offers a wider perspective, stressing the position of farmers and workers within the 'community'; but Newby approaches the subject with the end-goal of explaining the lack of conflict between both sides, where concepts of deference, powerlessness and dependence are prevalent. This may, indeed, be the position of farm-workers in modern society; but historical analysis of the same geographical area by Howkins identifies endemic conflict culminating in collective action. Deference, as Snell has concluded, was tactic adopted by farmworkers in the nineteenth century south of England, in reaction to their precarious market position and the dominance of power structures by landlords and farmers. Therefore, while the basic approach of Newby is a clear starting point for an examination of workplace relations, radically different social and economic parameters could clearly produce a very different set of relational circumstances. Therefore the prime agenda for this chapter is - what factors governed the work, market and social situations of Scottish farms servants during the early part of the twentieth century, and what were the resulting tactics they adopted in relations with their employers?

¹ The importance of the level and nature of employer-employee contact will be discussed later.

Work situation

Within this sphere Newby was interested in social relations within the workplace, or, at a very basic level, how farm workers related to their employers and other workers at the point of production. An immediate comparison between the region that has received most academic attention (East Anglia), and Scotland, is possible through comments made by immigrant Scottish farmers who moved to eastern England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

"There was something else about the Suffolk farmers we Scots couldn't understand - their snobbery. In Scotland there is no distinction between a farmer's son and a farm-worker's son, for instance, but it was quite another tale in Suffolk. We couldn't understand this. Labourers' sons as well as farmers' sons came down to restore the southern farms, if the southerners did but know it. But I supposed they couldn't tell us apart. The Suffolk farmers' snobbery was quite unjustified - they were just ordinary working farmers who weren't working! That was what was happening. They were all copying the Big House, Colonel This and Sir That. Their wives were sitting in the best room with the village girls as maids. A village woman would scrub a farmhouse through for her dinner and her insurance stamp - that is what times were like. But the farmers hadn't twopence to rub together and owed money everywhere. Yet it didn't stop them looking surprised when they saw our women working out on the land. As for the labourers, what a bad deal they had. Some of them didn't get paid for weeks on end....Fancy feudalism in 1929. The ordinary village folk were being pushed about all over the place by the classy farmers. Classy! They thought they were classy - that was about it. I tell you, we had never seen such airs and graces. The cottage man here was subservient by nature. He'd be touching his forelock whereas a Scot would be saying, 'I'm as good as you, Jock, any bloody day!'"¹

It is clear, therefore, that farmers from Scotland had a different relationship with workers from that of their counterparts in East Anglia. The general absence of class divisions between farmers and workers in northern and western Britain has been commented upon by a number of historians, who have linked it with the continuation of farm service (particularly living-in), and the high proportion of farms that were small and relied heavily on family labour. These two factors ensured that farmers rarely had the financial purchasing power to distinguish themselves as a separate social class, and

¹ Jamie McIver, a farmer who moved from the south of Scotland to Suffolk in 1932, quoted in Blythe, R., *Akenfield: portrait of an English village* (Penguin, London, 1972), pp.316-317. See also the comments in Smith, E.L., *Go east for a farm: a study of rural migration* (Agricultural Economics Research Institute, University of Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1932), p.38; and Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, p.306.

that farmers and workers engaged in employment and leisure activities together. Such a situation was most conspicuous in south-west Wales where Jenkins concluded that 'the characteristic feature of the Welsh farming system throughout the nineteenth century was the absence of any pronounced class division between tenant farmers and labourers'¹; similar conclusions of a more egalitarian society have also been made for Scotland and northern England².

However, there are problems with the general application of this hypothesis to early twentieth century Scotland. To begin with the majority of historical work on rural class relations outside south and east England only covers the period up to 1914. Of greater importance are the widespread variations in the agricultural production structure throughout lowland Scotland, particularly with relevance to the incidence of farm service and living-in, the size of production units, and the proportion of labour derived from the farmer's family³. Therefore a variety of social experiences could occur on Scottish farms, as Jamieson and Toynbee discovered in their oral history of Scottish rural childhood:

'When farm servants were employed, the social relations of work contrasted quite sharply with crofting; there were class divisions between employers and employees in the working environment of the farm itself. Although few of the farmers' children spoke about social class directly, it was clear that some of their fathers kept a degree of social distance from their employees.'⁴

Newby placed much emphasis on the 'size effect', the link between size of production unit and workplace relations, stressing that on smaller farms relations would tend to be diffuse, personal and *patriarchal*, whilst on larger farms the tendency would be towards the impersonal, with formalised employment rules, a *bureaucratic* administration. Clearly the awareness of social distinction will be greater under the bureaucratic regime, leading to a

¹ Jenkins, D., *The agricultural community in south-west Wales at the turn of the twentieth century* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1971), p.262; Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed*, pp.10-11.

² Munro, B., 'The bothy ballads: the social context and meaning of the farm servants' songs of north-eastern Scotland' *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (1977), p.192; Campbell, R.H. and Devine, T.M., 'The rural experience' in Fraser, W.H. and Morris, R.J. (eds.), *People and society in Scotland, II, 1830-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1990), p.61; Howkins, A., *Reshaping rural England: a social history 1850-1925* (Harper Collins, London, 1991), pp.20-23; Mutch, A., 'The 'farming ladder' in north Lancashire, 1840-1914: myth or reality?' *Northern History*, 27 (1991), pp.162-183.

³ See chapters 2-3; Smith, E.L., *Go east for a farm*, pp.24-26.

⁴ Jamieson, L. and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns: growing up 1900-1930* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992), p.151.

higher incidence of class conflict and the requirement for formalised methods of control¹.

The two local case study areas under examination had substantially dissimilar production structures; for example, the average farm size in East Lothian was about double of that in Dumfries, and in 1921 29% of holdings were above 300 acres in East Lothian compared to 5% in Dumfries. Facts which suggest the possibility of different social experiences between the two counties.

Workers who were interviewed in East Lothian described varied levels of farmer involvement in the workplace. It was only on the smallest farms in the area that farmers worked alongside the workers all the time. Given the larger average farm size in East Lothian, most farmers were only occasionally involved in manual farm work.

'At East Barns did the farmer work with the workers?

Sometimes, very seldom though. Most if you were working amongst cattle, anything he had to pick himself; sometimes if you were pushed at the threshing he would get onto the mill and start feeding. But it was very seldom, he mostly had work to do or away to Edinburgh to the market.

So you didn't see much of him?

Not a lot, no. Usually first thing in the morning...he always liked to be about the steading to see us get started.'²

'On most places what I knew they were all the same...[the farmers] went about dressed, they didn't have any overalls. The only time I saw this old farmer [working] was in the harvest time....if he was anxious he would go out and poke up any [flattened] barley for the binders.

You didn't have much to do with the farmer?

No, no. If he came out to the field, he never came near...he spoke to the gaffer, if the gaffer was there, either that or he walked past you and said "good morning" and walked on.'³

Given that the appearance of the farmer working in the field was an uncommon occurrence, the workers resented any attempts by their employer to intervene in the pattern of work - work was clearly regarded as the domain of the farm servant.

'Did the farmers work with you?'

¹ Newby, H., 'Agricultural workers in the class structure', p.425; *The deferential worker*, p.121.

² Interview Foggo.

³ Interview Denholm.

Some of them did, and some of them didnae. Some of them, when they came out, he would put so many drills at this side and so many drills at that side, away from each other so they [the workers] wouldnae speak....And I can mind...he [the farmer] asked me if I would go out and help them at the hay, and I said I would. And I went out and started to work with them. And they all had drills, all together....And the old farmer came out, and there was yen [one] left back, a drill left back. And he came and told me to go back and get that drill, and he took mine, and was I no' cross. And I stuck in and passed them and kept in front of them. And he was foaming at me for that, but I didnae care.'¹

'Did you see the farmer at all?

Oh he always walked out amongst you. This old boy at Whittinghame Mains, he was never away from your feet, oh he was an old slave-driver. He had gout...two of us had to heave up the bales [of hay] to the men on the lorry, and this day - God, he was stood right up behind me, and I stepped back on his gouty foot, you never saw him all day after that [laughs]....He had no business standing behind me.'²

Most of the East Lothian farmers who were interviewed confirmed that they worked with the workers at times of high labour demand (hay harvest, cereal harvest, threshing); though, and perhaps not surprisingly, they claimed they did more manual work than the workers said they actually did; the reason being that they did not want to become too separated from their workforce.

'You worked with the men most of the time?

I did....I think it was always a good thing to be with them, the whole time. Not spying on them, but working away with them, it keeps a different atmosphere, it keeps them from talking a lot of nonsense.'³

In Dumfriesshire employers were more likely to be actively involved in manual labour alongside the workers, and both farmers and workers mentioned the greater involvement of the farmer and his family. However, much depended on individual circumstances; workers were likely at some stage in their working experience to spend time on a farm which only had a small number of workers - one worker professed that being on a small farm resulted in a much better relationship with the farmer because he got to

¹ Interview Raeburn.

² Interview Waite.

³ Interview Drysdale. Mr. Drysdale's farm (Mainshill) was relatively small by East Lothian standards, 220 acres employing 3 pairs of horses.

know him well¹. But on the larger farms there was still a tendency for farmers to dress in a 'collar-and-tie', and be absent for actual farm work.

'Did the farmers work with you?

Oh yes, they did...at the busy times, hay and harvest. Some of them did. But at Townhead, Mr. McCall never came out to the fields at all. My dad was the foreman and the (farmer's) two sons worked, but Mr. McCall never came out. [When] My father wanted to see him once, he had to go to the farmhouse.'²

Two factors separated worker experience in East Lothian from that in Dumfriesshire. Firstly, some single workers in Dumfries were boarded on the farms, receiving meals in the farmhouse³. The decline of living-in farm service has been identified by a number of historians as a major causal factor in changing social relations in rural England, especially the shift away from a patriarchal relationship to a purely contractual one⁴. Living-in could involve a variety of different circumstances, and there was certainly a trend by the late nineteenth/early twentieth century for separating the meal times of farm servants from those of the farmer's family in areas where living-in continued to persist⁵. The provision of meals, and sometimes accommodation, in the farmhouse undoubtedly increased the level of contact between employer and employees, but it could also be used as a rather stark reminder to the workers of their different social position.

'At one time they used to feed the workers in the kitchen.... And it wasn't always the same stuff they were getting. Very often, they [the workers] were at the bottom of the table and the table was divided, and you got what you were to get and *they* [the farmer's family] had something much better. I've known them go into the town to buy some fish, so much for themselves and so much for the kitchen.'⁶

¹ Interview Barber.

² Interview McIntyre.

³ See chapters 3 and 6.

⁴ Snell, K.D.M., *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985), ch.2; Miller, C., 'Master and man: farmers and employees in nineteenth-century Gloucestershire' in B.Stapleton (ed.), *Conflict and community in southern England: essays in the social history of rural and urban labour from medieval to modern times* (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1992), pp.199-209.

⁵ Howell, D.W., 'The agricultural labourer in nineteenth-century Wales' *Welsh History Review*, 6 (1973), p.278; Carter, I., *Farmlife on northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979), pp.157-158.

⁶ Interview Bell.

The other major difference between the two counties was the labour hierarchy. Newby concluded that 'the number of levels of hierarchy in the organizational structure of the farm is a better predictor of the frequency of farmer-worker interaction than the absolute number of workers employed'¹. The nature of pre-mechanised Scottish agriculture meant that there was continual demand for a relatively skilled and specialised workforce, and with the slow spread of mechanisation prior to 1939 there was little change in the labour force structure. The exact situation on each farm was dependent on its size and output. The largest group in both counties were the horsemen, a consequence of the high labour inputs that any arable production requires; however, the greater importance of livestock in Dumfriesshire meant that there were a higher proportion of shepherds, cattlemen and dairymen in that county (the latter were almost non-existent in East Lothian). Larger average farm size in East Lothian resulted in a much higher number of workers per holding (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of workers per holding in Dumfriesshire and East Lothian, 1921

County	Regular	Casual	Total
Dumfriesshire	1.64	0.39	2.02
East Lothian	6.38	1.23	7.61

Source: Agricultural statistics, 1921

Note: Excluding farmer and spouse

The result was a more accentuated and specialised labour hierarchy in East Lothian, which reached its peak on the large, arable farms in the eastern half of the county. Mr. Foggo worked on one of the largest farms in East Lothian, East Barns, which, during the late 1930s, had 17 horsemen, 4 cattlemen, 7 orramen, 4 tractormen, 10 women and 1 shepherd as regular workers, and over 30 casual workers, plus 3 grieves (one for the regular men, one for the regular women, and one for the casual workers). The need for such a large labour force had two major consequences for farmer-worker relations, the farmer had to employ an intermediary to supervise the actual

¹ Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, p.303.

labour process, and a formal hierarchy developed amongst the workers. For the latter there was a particularly strict system amongst the horsemen.

'Everything was always very strict and regimented, the likes of the horsemen coming out in the morning - the first one had to come out to the horse trough first and then the second one, and they followed in their order. And were they going along the road, maybe to a field to start ploughing, they always had to go in their order and come back that way too. And it was the same with the women workers, you had what we called a forewoman, and she led off the squad, and wo betide anybody that passed her.'¹

These hierarchies encouraged the acquisition of specialist skills; and specialisation in the workplace resulted in the award of status based on skill and ability to do a particular job (interactional status)².

'Any ploughman would refuse to allow any other ploughman to work his pair of horses. He grooms, feeds, and stables them. Most ploughmen would refuse to do any byre work. When a number of ploughmen turn out to plough together or to do any other work as a team, they are punctilious to keep their due order, from the first ploughman, who leads, to the halflin' or callant, who has been promoted to his first pair [of horses] who brings up the rear. A ploughman will not remain in a place where he has not a pair of horses in which he can take a reasonable pride. His drills must bear the criticism of his fellows. His stacks must stand wind and weather. He must be able to handle his horses yoked to any implement. The Scots farm-worker is still a craftsman with a real pride in his craft. The shepherd is keen to put his lambs through the sale ring in such condition that he does not fall sixpence a head behind his fellows. The work in all classes of farm-workers has to be performed where it is open to the criticism of competitors for the place of first ploughman or foreman, and the competition for places is severe. To be the first to get the harvest in the stackyard is often a matter of pride, and the best men will not stay in a place where the work is always behind.'³

A number of rural historians have stressed the importance of the position of a 'foreman' in labour relations, and his ability to create or prevent conflict.

¹ Interview Foggo. Similar hierarchies occurred in north of England, Wales and in other areas of Scotland; Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects of farm labour in north Northumberland' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 4 (1937), pp.299-300; Jenkins, D., *The agricultural community in south-west Wales*, pp.81-84; Carter, I., *Farm life in northeast Scotland*, p.140; Adams, D.G., *Bothy nights and days: farm bothy life in Angus and the Mearns* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1991), p.28; Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses: the horselads of East Yorkshire* (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991), ch.7.

² Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, pp.29-31.

³ J.F. Duncan (General Secretary of the SFSU) talking about the situation in the Lothians, quoted in Scott, J.W.R., *The dying peasant and the future of his sons* (Williams and Norgate, London, 1926), pp.199-200. See also Robertson, B.W., 'The Border farm worker 1871-1971: industrial attitudes and behaviour' *Journal of Agricultural Labour Science*, 2 (1973), pp.75-76.

For example, in East Yorkshire, orders were handed out by the foreman, the farmers' appointee, who had to deal with the head horseman or 'waggoner' whom, because of his interactional status, often commanded more respect from the other horsemen¹. In Norfolk, work intensity was similarly managed through the 'head teaman' and the 'lord'². For the large farms of East Lothian the prime manager of labour was the grieve (or steward).

'On many large farms the master has very little direct contact with the men. His orders are given to the steward or grieve, and the work is arranged by that functionary. His position becomes a most important and responsible one, so much so, that among the labourers the character of a farm is frequently described not by allusion to the farmer, but to the steward. It must not, however, be thought that the fact of a farmer not interfering between the steward and the men means that he takes no interest in the comforts and prosperity of his men. Far from it. Out of respect to the steward, and because it has always been the custom, Lothian farmers do not often speak to the men on business matters. The work for each day is discussed and settled by master and steward from time to time, and it remains with the steward, who, having risen from the ranks of ploughmen himself, thoroughly understands the handling of men and horse, to see that it is done with despatch and economy.'³

The majority of the East Lothian workers considered the grieve to be an important person, who basically ran the farm. An unpopular grieve would cause workers to leave⁴. In many cases the farmer deliberately avoided getting involved in disputes concerning the nature and intensity of work, leaving the grieve to manage day-to-day problems, thus any antagonism could be deflected onto an employed individual.

'If you had a complaint who would you got to?

You complained to the grieve, and if you didnae get satisfaction with the grieve, well you went further up. But some of the farms the grieve, if he said you were to go and you went to the farmer he would say - "Well, if he says you have to go, then you have to go"; but other farmers wouldnae do that.'⁵

'The grieves? Some of them was gae harsh, and some of them was alright. At East Learmouth there was a right old grieve, he was a boy, a right

¹ Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses*, ch.7; *idem*, 'Twentieth-century farm servants: the horselads of the East Riding of Yorkshire' *Agricultural History Review*, 39 (1991), pp.155-156.

² Howkins, A., 'Structural conflict and the farmworker', pp.226-227.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour: the agricultural labourer*, III (P.P.1893-4, XXXVI, Cd.6894), Pt.II, p.115, report on East and Midlothian.

⁴ Interview Porteus.

⁵ Interview Porteus.

taskmaster...Davidson the farmer came round to speak to you..and Joe [the orraman] said, "I know the difference between you and the gaffer, you're quiet and he's a savage". And Davidson says, "there's no use keeping a dog and doing the barking yourself".¹

Other farmers, however, stressed their approachability if there were any serious problems; and this included changing accents and word usage in order to communicate in an effective manner with workers².

In Dumfriesshire circumstances were different, smaller farms meant less specialisation, fewer grieves, and more direct farmer-to-worker contact.

'At Lockerbie the farmer worked with you?

Aye, he was one of the workers, and the oddfellow and me.

You got on fairly well?

Och aye, got on grand. He used to ask you what you were going to be doing, he didn't come out and say- get on and do this of the next thing.³

On the other hand, the regional differences should not be overstressed; although Dumfriesshire farms rarely reached the size of the large East Lothian ones, a considerable number still required grieves, and a number of respondents experienced problematical relations with a grievance.

'A lot would depend on the type of farmer. If you get up into what we class as a 'gentleman farmer'....he's not working. He would have a grievance to see that everybody did the work.

In that situation most workers would deal with the grievance?

That's right, that's who they got their orders from. The grievance would see the boss, probably the night before, and say what he would like done.

Do you think that put the grievance in a difficult situation?

Oh, aye. Sometimes there wouldn't be the harmony between the grievance and the worker. He would need to be somebody who would have a right good thick skin, prepared to accept anything that was thrown at him.⁴

One group who had a different relationship with farmers were shepherds. Dealing with sheep required specialist skills which most farm servants had little experience of, and a farmer would deal directly with shepherd when discussing the management of the flock. Sometimes these consultations were not so common, especially on hill-sheep farms located in the Lammemuir (on the East Lothian and Roxburghshire/Berwickshire border)

¹ Interview Trotter.

² Interview Main and Foggo; Jamieson, L. and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns*, pp.197-198.

³ Interview Bell.

⁴ Interview Jardine.

and in the upland areas of Dumfriesshire (near the towns of Sanquhar, Moffat and Langholm), where shepherds would be left to work on their own for weeks at a time¹. Given the level of responsibility and independence that the shepherd retained, the relationship between employer and worker tended to be more egalitarian.

'As a shepherd did you work on your own?

Yes, aye. Oh aye, you had to work on your own.

Who told you what to do, the grieve or the farmer?

Nobody told you what to do. You knew and you got on with it. It's only when they wanted sheep for the sale, they came and told you.²

In Dumfriesshire, dairymen were on a similar footing to shepherds, though contact with the farmer was much more frequent³. Cattlemen also retained a certain amount of responsibility, and in some cases reported directly to the farmer. The reason behind the general exclusion of the grieve from many livestock matters was that many of them had previously been horsemen, as one farmer put it - 'the grieve only looked after the arable side....the grieve, what did he ken about stock?'⁴.

Excluded from the discussion so far has been the position of women farm workers. Women made up a substantial proportion of the regular workforce in both areas and throughout much of Scotland (as a percentage of the regular labour force, 1921: Dumfriesshire 18.8, East Lothian 29.8, lowland Scotland, 20.7)⁵, a position that was not replicated to any large degree in other parts of Britain. The basic analysis of the position of women in capitalist agriculture is that the organisation of labour was patriarchal, with women concentrated in low paid, monotonous unskilled labour or a few specialist areas associated with female 'virtues' (e.g. dairying). With the decline in the agricultural labour force, the position of women was gradually

¹ Interview Sykes and Maxwell. In the Borders the shepherd was always regarded as a highly responsible and independent worker; Littlejohn, J., *Westrigg: the sociology of a Cheviot parish* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1963), p.32; Robertson, B.W., 'The Border farm worker', pp.73-74.

² Interview Lawrie.

³ Interview Hunter.

⁴ Interview Graham. On the position of cattlemen see Robertson, B.W., 'The Border farm worker', p.74. The patterns of occupational inheritance amongst farmworkers are examined by Henderson, R., 'Some sociological aspects', pp.306-311.

⁵ See chapter 3.

eroded, and mechanisation enhanced male predominance¹. Detailed examinations of the history of the modern agricultural labour force have generally ignored women, especially when it comes to the twentieth century².

Patterns of female employment in southern Scotland conform to historical expectations. In East Lothian they were primarily used as field workers, while in Dumfriesshire they had a more mixed role of some domestic work, some dairy work and some field work. Women were consistently paid less than men³. On the large East Lothian farms, where sizeable female squads were important, a hierarchy similar to that for horsemen was in operation headed by a forewoman, who set the pace of work⁴. At the bottom of the hierarchy were teenage girls, who were paid lower wages according to their age (half wage at 14, three-quarters at 16, and a full wage at 18/19)⁵. There were also occasions when the forewoman would lead both male and female workers, though where a separate grieve was employed to supervise the women he was always a man.

'I got a pound extra, that was for keeping the time and keeping the workers right, in the year....And when the men was working with me, they followed me. They had to do what I told them to do....

Did that happen very often?

Not very often, like for the singling and the shawing, and the kale and the hay, in hay time, harvesting, they followed me.'⁶

Women were rarely involved in specialised skilled labour, except where cattle (particularly dairy cows) were involved. However, the labour shortages created by the First World War did temporarily alter the situation, and one of the female interviewees drove a pair of horses during the late 1910s/early

¹ For a general discussion of the social position of women in agriculture see Bradley, H., *Men's work, women's work: a sociological history of the sexual division of labour in employment* (Polity, Cambridge, 1989), ch.4.

² The exception to this is Bouquet, M., *Family, servants and visitors: the farm household in nineteenth and twentieth century Devon* (Geo, Norwich, 1985)

³ See chapter 3.

⁴ Interview Leckie, Raeburn, Waite, Trotter.

⁵ Interview Waite.

⁶ Interview Raeburn.

1920s, though she never ploughed¹. Similarly, where circumstances required, women would assist shepherds².

Therefore, although the women were an important part of the labour force, they were generally confined to specific 'women's' tasks, and at work remained separated from their male colleagues for most of the time. Only when men were doing unskilled work were women placed in any position of authority. Despite their low pay and status, the women who were interviewed did not complain of their situation in gender terms; in fact the only worker who did protest about the treatment of women was male.

'They didnae get paid for what they did, because they did a lot of the jobs the men didnae like, like shawing turnips or spreading muck. They werenae paid at all [well]. Days hardly fit for a dog to be out, [they would be] out shawing turnips....Och, they were treated like dogs, nae wonder they stopped working out.'³

Social situation

Although this thesis is primarily concerned with relations in the workplace, some examination of the social position that farm workers faced in the community is required, given the importance that Newby placed on such circumstances⁴.

Throughout Scotland, and unlike many parts of rural England, farm workers lived almost entirely in tied housing located on the farm⁵. The result was that employer and worker were in close proximity; but these were not 'farm' communities as the Newby typology would have identified them. Farm communities were those where farmers and workers felt geographically and

¹ Interview Raeburn. This is confirmed by a Board of Trade report which identifies women working with horses on an East Lothian farm. However the number of occasions when women directly replaced men was small. (Board of Trade, 'Report on the state of employment in agriculture in Great Britain at the end of January 1917', p.7; '....at the end of July 1917', p.13).

² BOAS, *Report of the Committee on women in agriculture in Scotland* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1920), p.68, John Kerr, farmer, East Lothian.

³ Interview Trotter.

⁴ Newby, H., 'The sources of variation'; *The deferential worker*, pp.45-56 and ch.6.

⁵ On Scotland see chapter 3 and Fenton, A., 'The housing of agricultural workers in the nineteenth century' in T.M.Devine (ed.), *Farm servants and labour in lowland Scotland 1770-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1984), pp.188-212. The contrast between England and Scotland is most clearly made by H.M. Conacher (a Board of Agriculture civil servant) in evidence to the Royal Commission on Housing; *Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban. Evidence* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1921), p.278.

socially isolated from the rest of the community, and where both parties could easily identify with each other, thus reducing class conflict¹. In rural southern Scotland a number of factors prevented the establishment of farm communities. Firstly, the number of workers at an individual farm could often create a worker 'community' of their own, particularly in East Lothian, where the largest farms might house up to a hundred people (hence the Scots word a 'ferm-toun'). Obviously the development of such communities was much more restricted in Dumfriesshire, given the smaller average farm size. Secondly, farm workers were surrounded by a large number of similar small communities, and given the levels of mobility in the industry, most workers would have experienced a variety of different farms and farmers, and come into contact with a considerable number of workers. These factors identify the social situation faced by workers as more akin to Newby's 'occupational' community, where workers mixed mainly with persons from their own social class and occupational background, and where status was distributed on an interactional basis (i.e. a function of the ability to perform a particular skill, for example, ploughing)². Therefore although the immediate 'community' for a farm servant was the farm, the wider community was that part of the county in which he/she circulated.

Although farmers and workers were housed in close proximity to one another, their level of social interaction outside the workplace was limited. One area where mixing definitely took place was school³. In East Lothian both workers' and farmers' children went to the same primary school, but afterwards many farmers (especially on larger farms) sent their children away to private schools in Edinburgh⁴. In Dumfriesshire, because of the requirement for family labour, farmers' children usually received the same educational experience as workers, i.e. leaving the local school as soon as possible⁵. The church was another possible area of social interaction, although its influence over the rural population was in decline, and not all those interviewed attended church on a regular basis⁶. Those interviewees who went to church nearly all attended the same one (Church of Scotland),

¹ Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, p.419.

² For the development of status systems within a local community see *ibid*, pp.323-326.

³ Jamieson, L. and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns*, p.152.

⁴ Interview Black, Graham, Denholm. Newby discovered a similar proportion of farmers who went to private school (Newby, H. et al., *Property paternalism and power*, p.64).

⁵ Interview Hastings and Maxwell.

⁶ On religion in rural Scotland see Brown, C.G., 'Religion and secularisation' in Dickson, A. and Treble, J.H. (eds.), *People and Society in Scotland, III, 1914-1990* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1992), p.60; Jamieson, L. and Toynbee, C., *Country bairns*, pp.87-88 and 158-159.

except one East Lothian worker who spoke of going to the 'chapel'¹; religion was not a socially divisive issue in rural lowland Scotland. Church membership, in particular, being an elder of the kirk, did not appear to raise an individual's status when it came to employment relations².

The other possible area of interaction was leisure time, but mixing here was limited. In East Lothian there appears to have been practically no leisure interaction at all, even a smaller farmer (Mr. Drysdale) commented that he would buy somebody a drink if they were going to market together, but basically farmer and worker left each other alone - 'I kept them at a distance'. The one exception to this was the 'kirk' (the harvest celebration), when a dance would be put on with food and drink provided by the farmer, but even then his attendance would only be for a few hours³. In Dumfriesshire the class boundaries were less clearly drawn, some interviewees claimed there was no social mixing outside work at all - 'you had your own class of people'⁴ - however others pointed to interaction at a number of gatherings, notably whist drives, carpet bowling and local dances.

'Did you mix socially?

We did in a sense, local hall, functions. They were on committees, or their wives, and I used to be President of the carpet bowling club, and I was playing bowls with them. We had a tennis club, most were from the farming fraternity, but there were some working people.'⁵

Even these activities only involved a limited level of interaction, and this meant that the distribution of communal status tended to be within two separate communities, farmers and workers. However, when the two groups were mixing the identification of individuals was on an 'attributional' level (status based on the existing class and power structure)⁶. A fact demonstrated by the manner in which farmers and workers addressed each other - employers were usually called 'the Boss' or 'Mr....'.

'How did you address the farmer?

¹ Interview Raeburn.

² Mr. Hunter did comment that farmers tended to be elders and that 'they were supposed to be the pillars of society', however this comment was made with very sarcastic overtones.

³ Interview Wright, Douglas, Main, Leckie, Porteus, Raeburn.

⁴ Interview Sykes.

⁵ Interview Hastings.

⁶ Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, p.324.

"Boss"....you kind of respected your elders, there was none of this "Jock" and "Jimmy" style. I always addressed somebody as Mr., cause you were always learnt to do that. In school days when you met your teacher down in the village you had to nod your head, and salute the minister.'¹

Therefore other members of society, teachers, ministers, etc., received greater social acknowledgement than employers. Further evidence can be found in the pages of the *Scottish Farm Servant* (the SFSU journal), in an extract from a short story concerning the lives of a farm worker and his family:

'Such an event as a visit from the Schoolmaster was almost unprecedented in the social status to which Peter and Kate Ann belonged. Social stratification, if such a term be permissible, is much more regularly rigid in the country than in the towns, despite the opinion of ignorant city-bred people, who believe that country society is an Arcadian blending of nymphs and shepherds, gracefully posed around the ancestral mansion of a well-loved laird of ancient pedigree and romantic history. The farm servants, as a rule, are seldom troubled by visits from forester, head-gardener, schoolmaster, or even the minister, who, under God and the Laird, form the aristocracy of the countryside.'²

Farmers, when addressing workers, predominantly used their first name. Some 'gentleman' farmers insisted on being called "Sir" when they were spoken to, but this was unusual³. Again on the smaller farms in Dumfriesshire such 'rules' were less strictly adhered to, and worker and farmer were sometimes on a first name basis if the worker had been there for a number of years or if the worker was older than the farmer⁴. However, the predominant use of 'Mr' by the workers was more an acknowledgement of the employment contract, than the social position of farmers, an acceptance that somebody had to be in overall charge. Interestingly, when a farmer spoke to a farmworkers' wife he addressed her as 'Mrs', as one worker commented - 'I think there was a fairly good relationship between the farmers and workers, I think they mostly had a good respect for each other.'⁵

¹ Interview Bell.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, February 1915, p.5, 'The adventures of Peter, junior'; there is obviously a very cynical tone towards the end, but note the absence of the farmer from the list of 'aristocratic' occupations.

³ Interview Saunders and Denholm.

⁴ Interview Barber, Clark, Sykes.

⁵ Interview McIntyre.

Market situation

The state of the labour market, at a macro-economic level, has been described in detail in chapter 3. To summarise, the labour market remained broadly in balance up to the late 1920s/early 1930s with a steady demand for labour and continued high rates of outmigration from rural areas. However, the onset of the Depression resulted in some decline in the demand for labour and, more critically, in the collapse of the migration system, with the result that unemployment occurred in Scottish rural areas for the first time in more than a century.

Newby identified two major constraints that limited the market situation of agricultural workers - the lack of alternative employment opportunities and the monopoly that farmers had over the local labour market, and also the opportunity cost of relocation for workers when accommodated in tied houses¹. It could be argued that some of the factors may have operated in East Lothian and Dumfriesshire during the first half of the twentieth century. For example, the incidence of tied housing was much greater than in Newby's case study, and given Dumfriesshire's geographical location, alternative occupations were limited. Though, on the latter point, the same could not be said of East Lothian, which contained a large mining industry in the west of the county, and was located close to a sizeable city (Edinburgh).

Nevertheless, oral evidence from both areas does not seem to indicate that workers felt that they were in a weak market position as far as employment went, even during the early 1930s. None experienced unemployment, or felt that getting a job was ever a problem. There were a number of possible reasons behind this. Although unemployment did occur during the 1930s it was never particularly high (around 5%), also it tended to affect the younger, less-skilled workers who would be more tempted to leave agricultural work and therefore become excluded from the oral history sample². One of the problems with interviewing farm workers is that they represent those who have chosen not to migrate occupationally. As noted in chapter seven, there was still some worker mobility between farms during the depression in both counties, and although farms did cut back on labour to a certain degree, it was never too drastic (nothing compared to the decline in demand resulting

¹ Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, ch.3; on tied houses see also Danziger, R., *Political powerlessness*, pp.151-163.

² See chapter 3.

from mechanisation in post-war agriculture¹). In addition, what must be remembered is that the particular labour market conditions of Scottish agricultural had been relatively stable since the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century, conditions which had resulted in the formation of particular patterns of behaviour and views of society by farm servants. These traditional attitudes were unlikely to be challenged in the short-run by the depression of the 1930s; the operation of local labour markets relies heavily on the codes, values and patterns of social behaviour and, for an individual, custom and tradition can have a strong impact on behaviour².

The universality of tied housing was a major potential influence on the situation of individuals within the local labour market. In other industries, in early twentieth century Scotland, tied housing was used by employers as a method of weakening the bargaining position of workers³, and contemporary commentators believed that the position in agriculture had similar potential.

'The houses...in the agricultural industry are much more intimately bound up with the general conditions of employment...and where so many are unsatisfactory they are bound to be a source of friction between employer and employed, to increase the prevailing unsettlement, to add to the unattractive conditions of farm service and to create a general dissatisfaction with rural industrial life. A man cannot easily make a home where so many of requisites of a clean and comfortable home are absent; where elementary provision for the the major decencies is conspicuous by its rarity; where a plentiful water-supply is considered not a commonplace but a luxury; where the provision of a bath in regarded as an ideal; where the house is a "tied" house from which the inmates may be ejected at a moment's notice for the most trivial of reasons and where, by the conditions of engagement, the labourer still suffers from the traditions of servile labour and is governed throughout, not by the conception of a free contract of service, but by the least progressive form of the master-and-servant relationship.'⁴

As would be expected, the SFSU was venomous in its attacks against the impact that tied housing had on the bargaining position of its members,

¹ On post-war Scottish agriculture see Bryden, J., 'Scottish agriculture, 1950-1980' in R.Saville (ed.), *The economic development of modern Scotland 1950-1980* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1985), pp.141-162.

² On the nature of society and local labour markets see Whipp, R., 'Labour markets and communities'; on custom and tradition see Hobsbawm, E.J., 'Custom, wages and work-load in nineteenth-century industry' in *idem* (ed.), *Labouring Men. Studies in the history of labour* (Weidenfield and Nicolson, London, 1964), pp.344-370.

³ Morris, R.J. and Smyth, J., 'Paternalism as an employer strategy, 1800-1960', (forthcoming in a publication edited by F.Wilkinson and J.Rubery (Oxford University Press)), p.8.

⁴ *Report of the Royal Commission on the housing of the industrial population of Scotland rural and urban* (P.P.1917-18, XIV, Cd.8731), p.173.

whilst the NFUS saw it as an essential element of the agricultural industry which was in the interest of farmer and worker¹.

All the farmers interviewed, not surprisingly, regarded the tied house favourably, seeing it as a benefit to the worker who paid neither rent nor rates, and providing them with an essential supply of labour for which there was no alternative housing. The reactions of the East Lothian workers was very mixed, some saw it as a benefit that farm workers really needed, given the limited stock of rural housing, but in general, most were aware that it placed them in a difficult position when bargaining with the farmer, and it tied them to a particular farm for a whole year, though none complained of actually being evicted from a house themselves.

'You had no comeback. If there were a row with a farmer, which could flare up very quickly, if you didn't work like a beast, you would get the chop. That was you, you had to go out....The farmer had an advantage because he could say you were insubordinate or something like that, although it never happened up here [Innerwick farm] because the farmer was a very nice man, he was a gentleman farmer, he never worked, he just went around with plus fours on, and he had a walk round the fields maybe twice a week....'²

Similarly in Dumfriesshire, the tied house was not a problem if the worker had a 'good boss'³, but 'if there was any disagreement between you and the farmer, you had to pipe down because you had no other house to go to'⁴.

However, as noted in chapter 7, the tied house did provide one major advantage to the worker, low mobility costs. If the worker disliked the farm/farmer, he could easily leave at the end of the employment term and find another job. Since this always entailed moving into another tied house, the cost of leaving a particular place of employment was minimal (especially given that the new employer always paid for the provision of transport to move any furniture). In any case, if the farm servant did change occupations then there was the possibility of moving into rented accommodation, particularly in towns, in which the vast majority of the working class population lived⁵. Therefore, tied housing was a double-edged sword, but it did mean that if workers were involved in a serious dispute with their

¹ *Scottish Farm Servant*, February 1920, p.45; July 1929, p.64. *Scottish Farmer*, 1937, p.1297, 'Report on a meeting of the Dumfries county branch of the NFUS'.

² Interview Denholm.

³ Interview Jardine.

⁴ Interview McIntyre.

⁵ McCrone, D. and Elliott, B., *Property and power in a city: the sociological significance of landlordism* (Macmillan, London, 1989), pp.25-26.

employer their best strategy was to keep quiet and move when the contract of employment reached its term¹.

¹ As noted in chapter 6, tied housing disputes rarely reached the courts; in Dumfriesshire for the period 1900-1920 the index for the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* produced only one reported case, 3 July 1920 - 'Action to eject D.C.M. winner'.

Conflict in the work situation

Work-based conflicts between farmers and farm workers are something that has fascinated labour historians¹. Recently the focus has been upon local, limited, farm-based conflict, through which, it is argued, farm workers were more active and successful, in pursuing their grievances². This section will deal primarily with such action, with the next section focusing on the impact of trade unionism in East Lothian and Dumfriesshire.

Despite the emphasis placed on poor rural employment relations by some historians, relations in Dumfriesshire and East Lothian between farmer and worker were generally good³.

'The relations between the farmer and his men are good. The evidence given by employers in all parts of the two counties leaves no doubt about their opinion. For the labourers themselves I had, with the exception of one meeting, a corroboration of what has been stated.' [East and Midlothian]⁴

'The relations between employers and employed are most cordial. The shepherds are a quiet, thoughtful, trustworthy, and generally superior set of men, always spoken of in the highest terms by their employers, and the answer given by some shepherds in Tweedsmuir, "farmers and shepherds are always the best of friends", was reiterated in almost identical terms whether the question was asked of the former or the latter. Nor is there any reason to suppose less cordial feelings between the farmers and their other servants.' [Border hills, including parts of Dumfriesshire]⁵

'Judged by the evidence from both masters and men over the whole district, the understanding between them would seem to be of a friendly character.' [Dumfries and Galloway]⁶

It would, of course, be dangerous to take the comments of the commissioners for the *Royal Commission on Labour* entirely at face value; on the other hand, it would also be incorrect to ignore them. One of the great

¹ Dunbabin, J.P.D., *Rural discontent in nineteenth-century Britain* (Faber and Faber, London, 1974); Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*; Bradley, D., *Farm labourers: Irish struggle 1900-1976* (Athol, Belfast, 1988); Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed*. The efforts at collective action in the 1870s and 1880s under the leadership of Joseph Arch have also received considerable attention.

² Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, p.38.

³ Howkins, A., 'Structural conflict and the farmworker'; Snell, K.D.M., 'Deferential bitterness', esp. pp.176-177.

⁴ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.115.

⁵ *ibid*, p.192.

⁶ *ibid*, Pt.I, p.102.

benefits of oral history is that these observations can be tested in the light of individual memory. The evidence from both counties was that relations were generally settled and disputes uncommon; having a problem with the farmer was regarded as unusual, and some interviewees believed that the worker was the most likely cause of a dispute¹. Farm servants were generally contented with their situation.

'The workers, they didn't expect anymore than what the farmers gave them....We didn't expect anymore we were quite happy with the little we used to get....We were happy in ourselves and in our work. We took a great pride in our work.'²

Therefore, there was no experience of 'endemic conflict', but neither was the situation one of 'deferential traditionalism'. Farm servants did not regard farmers as their social superiors, and would challenge the farmer's individual right to command authority if they (the workers) felt that their individual position was being threatened. Scottish farm workers were in a situation of relative socio-economic independence when it came to employment relations, a fact demonstrated in their general social attitudes.

'The independence of the labourer of present times, although it annoys some and is sometimes spoken of as a bad feature, is not in my opinion indicative of any loss of sympathy for those with whom they have to do. Once a person gets over the want of politeness and courtesy, which is to a large extent a feature of Scottish character, there is something dignified and worthy of commendation in the rough and ready honesty of a Lothian hind [married horseman]. He may not be overburdened with manners, but what he lacks in that quarter is fully made up in truth and honesty of purpose and action. A stranger accustomed to the scraping and bowing of an Irishman would resent the bold bearing of a Lothian labourer, but to a Scotch master it really means nothing, for he is accustomed to it. If the hind has his own political or social opinions and records his vote according to his conscience, he had a perfect right to do so; and because these votes and opinions perhaps do not altogether coincide with the views of their masters, it is absurd to blame him or make out that he is too independent.'³

The disputes that did occur tended to reinforce the independence of the worker when it clashed with the authority of farmer. They were usually short,

¹ Interview Jardine, Barber and Heard.

² Interview McIntyre.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.121, report on East and Midlothian.

very heated arguments over a particular aspect of work, which rarely resulted in a sacking or refusal to work. Here is just one example:

'I was sent down with a cart to lift these turnips. At breakfast time I had left my horse along beside the field and went along to have my breakfast with the other men [in the next field]. And this horse had gone forward and started grazing at the grass at the hedgerow, and the farmer could see it. And he came down, and I could see he was a bit cross, and he yoked into me about this horse eating the frosty grass....He tore strips off me for this, and I says, "But we work a quarter of an hour at dinner time...for our breakfast time", which was eight to quarter past eight. He says, "What's that got to do with it?". "This much", I says, "I'm entirely not to have anything to do with the horse at that time, that quarter of an hour is mine....that horse could have went away to the sea". He says to me, "Oh, you're very clever". And I said, "No I don't think so, I'm only stating a fact, and you came down there and started tearing strips off me, which I thought was quite unreasonable....I could have gone home and had my breakfast and left the horse". "In future", he says, "you'll see that it doesn't do that". He had the last. But that was the only time [I had a dispute].'¹

Disputes very rarely went to court, and therefore reports of court proceedings tend to be biased towards the most extreme cases where relations completely broke down².

Where a grieve was in charge, he provided a possible source of conflict control.

'The intervention of a farm steward appears to have had a remarkable effect in keeping the peace between the master and the men. The steward being as it were a medium and umpire, a person entrusted with the confidence of both parties, he acted as a sort of buffer.'³

However the grieve could also be a potential source of conflict, particularly if he was deemed to be unfair, and was unpopular with the workers:

'In 1926 this grieve, he'd been there quite a while, there was a woman grieve as well who looked after the women, and this woman grieve got on great with the boss. And he knocked him [the woman grieve] out, so he had to leave. So that year there were an awful lot of folk who left East Barns, 'cause when they kent this grieve was going and this other boy was getting

¹ Interview Denholm.

² On the use of the courts see chapter 6. For examples of disputes that came to court in East Lothian see *Scottish Farmer*, 8 December 1927, p.1631, 31 December 1932, p.1744; *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 20 March 1931; and in Dumfriesshire, *Scottish Farmer*, 14 October 1911, p.929; *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 7 January 1903, 9 December 1936.

³ *Royal Commission on Labour*, Pt.II, p.28, summary report.

on, well I wouldnae say they didn't like him, but we didnae care for him to be a gaffer, and [so we] left.'¹

Over the long run, because of the unchanged nature of agricultural production and the general stability of rural society, relations between farmers and workers remained much the same. However, there is a general view amongst historians that the First World War accentuated class antagonisms. The general factors behind this - the unsatisfied demand for labour, price and wage instability, and open evidence of excess profiteering - had as much impact on the rural as the urban population². There was a shortage of farm labour, particularly skilled workers, farm workers saw their real wages eroded by wartime inflation, and farmers were making substantial profits³. In these circumstances, there is evidence that industrial relations were deteriorating, especially with the return of demobilised soldiers, with south-east Scotland labelled as a district experiencing particular discontent⁴. Discontent which was directed into formalised collective action.

Trade unionism and collective action

The history of trade union activity in East Lothian and Dumfriesshire was completely divergent, with East Lothian being the main stronghold of the SFSU, and Dumfriesshire a county where the Union systematically failed to gain a sizeable foothold for any length of time.

Following the formation of the SFSU in Aberdeenshire in 1912, the Union rapidly spread south, so that by the time the first *Scottish Farm Servant* was published in the spring of 1913 it had 16 branches in East Lothian⁵. The first records of union activity date from December 1912, when a considerable debate took place within the letter pages of the *Haddingtonshire Courier*

¹ Interview Porteus.

² On general class consciousness during the First World War see Waites, B., *A class society at war: England 1914-1918* (Berg, Leamington Spa, 1987), ch.6.

³ see chapters 2-3. A joke printed in the *Scottish Farm Servant*, January 1919, p.248: 'Farmer's Son - "What did you do in the Great War, Daddy?" Farmer - "I did very well".'

⁴ Board of Trade, 'Report on the state of employment in agriculture in Great Britain at the end of January 1918', p.4 and 10; '...at the end of April 1919', p.9.

⁵ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1913, p.18; August 1913, p.17.

over the advantages and potential effectiveness of a trade union¹. By August 1914 the Union organiser reported branch meetings of 150-200 workers in the county². Therefore, even before the dramatic membership increases associated with the period 1918-20, the union had secured a sizeable representation within the county, as this report from the local newspaper indicates:

'Hiring Friday was marked by exceptionally pleasant weather and this no doubt tended to increase the very large number of people who visited the Burgh. Exceptional interest attached to the proceedings in view of labour conditions due to the war, and the active propaganda among farm servants with a view to a rise of wages. Early in the day speakers representative of the Farm Servants' Union were busy in the streets and secured considerable audiences. The principal aim of their addresses was to get all classes of rural workers to stand out for a much enhanced wage, and to defer hiring until the farmers were forced to capitulate.'³

There is also evidence to suggest that women were being actively recruited into the Union⁴. Although union membership fell following the collapse of the post-war boom in 1921, East Lothian remained a major area of strength for the SFSU and regularly achieved the laurel of top county recruiter⁵. A 1925 survey of union branches within the county estimated that two-thirds of hired workers were unionised⁶, with a total membership of 1600 in 1927⁷.

The pattern of relatively strong organisation is confirmed by the interviewees, most of whom were union members during the interwar period. However, they also admitted that there was a large number of workers who were not in the Union, and the proportion of members was less than that claimed by the Union in 1925⁸. Particularly informative was a comment by Mr. Trotter, a ploughman who spent much of his working life in the Borders where unionisation was much lower; he described the Lothians as 'strong union country'.

¹ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 6 December 1912 - 21 February 1913.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, August 1914, p.5.

³ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 11 February 1916.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, September 1917, p.78; June 1920, p.59.

⁵ *Scottish Farm Servant*, February 1925, p.176; September 1925, p.95; SFSU branch circular 29 January 1926.

⁶ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 4 April 1925.

⁷ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1927, p.230.

⁸ Mr. Denholm, himself a union activist, reckoned that no more than half the workers were in the union; but this may have been due to the fact that union membership had fallen during the interwar years.

In Dumfriesshire, attempts at union organisation were recorded in 1912. Between four and five branches were included on the Union's published list between April 1913 and March 1914, but they then disappeared¹. During most of the First World War a separate organisation, confusingly called the Dumfries and Galloway Farm Servants' Union, was the only farm worker trade union active in the area. A number of meetings were reported in the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, in which it appears that this union campaigned for higher wages and better working conditions. However, its meetings were always held in Castle Douglas (Kirkcudbrightshire), and its reported membership figure was only 109 in 1916². When it came to electing representatives to the District Wage Committees in 1917, the SFSU was the prime organiser. From early 1918 onwards the SFSU began actively to recruit and establish a branch structure³; but in 1920 organisational problems and lack of enthusiasm were already being reported.

'Dumfries fair being on the 31st March, a meeting was arranged to be held on that morning. Miss Sutherland [the women's organiser] came down to Dumfries, also to see what could be done among the women workers. A disappointment was in store for us, as very few people took the opportunity of coming round to the meeting to discuss conditions for the ensuing term. Now, I would just like to give Dumfriesshire men a word of warning; if they don't pick up courage and organise themselves they will soon be working under the worst conditions existing in Scotland, if they are not that already.'⁴

In June 1922 the Union refused to provide an overall wage figure for the county because it had so few members; and by 1924, when the SFSU was facing financial problems, it decided to abandon both Wigtown and Dumfries⁵. When a union organiser visited the county in 1930 he reported a complete lack of interest, and it was not until 1935 that a union presence was re-established⁶.

Oral evidence confirms the lack of union activity during the interwar period, only two out of the ten Dumfriesshire workers who were interviewed were

¹ *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 18 December 1912; *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1913, p.18, March 1914, p.15.

² *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 10 June 1914, 9 December 1914, 10 February 1915, 10 March 1915, 8 December 1915, 7 June 1916.

³ *Scottish Farm Servant*, March 1918, p.155, August 1919, pp.74-75.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, May 1920, p.39. See also August 1921, pp.324-325.

⁵ *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1922, p.540; SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 9 November 1924.

⁶ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 14 September 1930, 13 April 1935; SFSU branch circular, 30 August 1935.

members prior to 1939. A number of interviewees claimed that there was no union prior to the Second World War.

'There was a Farm Servants' Union, but it never got any strength. There were just these few who were in it....It never had any power.'¹

Therefore no potential for collective action was displayed in Dumfriesshire.

In East Lothian trade union agitation began, in 1913, with a campaign for the introduction of a half-holiday on Saturday, and the Union claimed some early success following a meeting with the East Lothian Farmers' Club. However, newspaper reports at the time say that the impact of the Union's policy was limited². What appears to have happened is that a restricted number of half-holidays throughout the farming year were offered to most workers³. Following the partial success of this policy, the Union began a 'war-bonus' campaign in 1915, but this had even less impact⁴.

Greater success came with the introduction of voluntary collective bargaining by the SFSU in the spring of 1917, when the Union and the local county branch of the NFUS negotiated an agreement on wage increases⁵. The ability of the Union to enforce collective decisions was demonstrated in 1919, when it successfully persuaded a large proportion of workers to support its demand for a wage increase at the hiring fair in Haddington⁶. In 1920 the two unions continued to meet, with a resulting agreement to reduce working hours and have a set working timetable for the whole county⁷. Negotiations broke down in 1921 as the farmers attempted to cut wages and increase working hours, and in the face of such pressure support for the Union's position collapsed.

'For the past two years agreements had been made on the working hours.....Two meetings had been held with the workers, both very largely

¹ Interview Sykes.

² *Scottish Farm Servant*, August 1913, pp.1-2, September 1913, pp.1-2; *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 13 February 1914.

³ *Scottish Farmer*, 28 February 1914, pp.208-9; *Royal Commission on housing. Evidence*, p.1327. T.Elder, tenant farmer; *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Evidence, I* (P.P.1919, VIII, Cd.345), p.115, Sir James Wilson, chairman of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Committee.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, September 1915, p.13; SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 25 July 1915.

⁵ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 9 February 1917; *Scottish Farm Servant*, March 1917, p.13.

⁶ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 14 March 1919.

⁷ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 27 February 1920; BOAS, *Report of the Committee on women in agriculture*, p. 68, J.Kerr, farmer; *Scottish Farm Servant*, March 1920, p.159.

attended at which members unanimously pledged themselves not to accept the altered method of reckoning the time and to refrain from hiring unless on the old conditions....A second meeting had been held on the morning of the Hiring Fair. Practically no effort had been made by the bulk of the members to carry out the resolution. Special meetings had been held to which every member was individually summoned and the members were asked to produce their agreements. Out of over 2000 members, less than 200 agreements were produced and, except in one branch, very few members had engaged on the Union terms.¹

Despite the seeming decline in union power within East Lothian, the SFSU reached the pinnacle of collective action in 1923 when it successfully organised the only large-scale strike by Scottish farm workers this century. The cause of the strike was continued efforts by the farmers to eliminate the concession of reduced working hours made prior to 1921. The SFSU persuaded most workers not to participate in the hiring fairs in March², and attempts to bring about a negotiated settlement failed. The impasse resulted in between 1,000 and 1,400 farm workers refusing to hire on new terms, or to vacate their tied houses on 28th May (the end date for the previous contracts), despite threats by employers to use the courts to eject workers from their homes. The farmers almost immediately negotiated for a compromise settlement, in which the final settlement was to be left to a mutually-agreed arbiter³.

Why was the Union so effective in 1923, when it had failed to gain a similar response in 1921? Clearly the farmers had finally pushed the workers too far in their continual demands for increased working hours during the period 1921-3, years which had also seen a sharp fall in cash wages without any increase in unemployment amongst farm workers⁴. Also the SFSU was much better organised; in 1921 communications had broken down with branches in East Lothian following disagreements over policy. In 1923 the Union invested a considerable amount of time in explaining to its members the position, and in organising collective action, for example, newspaper reports of the March hiring fairs confirm the presence of union pickets.

¹ SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 30 March 1921; *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 11 March 1921; *Scottish Farm Servant*, June 1921, p.300.

² *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 9 and 16 March 1923.

³ Details of the strike can be found in the following material; *Scottish Farm Servant*, March-July 1923 (including a special supplement on the strike in June); SFSU Executive Committee minutes, 16 June 1923; SFSU branch circulars, 30 March and 31 May 1923; *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 9 March - 26 June 1923. The arbiter eventually decided upon a small increase in working hours.

⁴ See chapters 3 and 7.

Similarly, when it came to the strike, the Union had a well-organised picketing system, and a number of interviewees remember groups of pickets stopping workers from moving farms, one specifically mentioned being chosen as a picket¹. Finally, farm workers in East Lothian must have been aware that a large farm strike was taking place at the same time in Norfolk².

Wage agreements were negotiated in the two years following the strike, with the SFSU cashing in on its 1923 success and gaining wage increases³. In 1927 the farmers demanded wage cuts in the light of falling agricultural prices, and despite the best efforts of senior SFSU officials, local branches and members eventually accepted a reduction in pay⁴. The Union found it difficult on this occasion to motivate workers into collective action, membership was falling rapidly (1926-8 national membership halved), and the workers were probably resigned to the fact that wages would fall in line with agricultural prices. However, the see-saw in union effectiveness continued when, in 1930, the SFSU prevented farmers from cutting wages, through the complete withdrawal of available labour at the hiring fair⁵; but in 1931-2 the NFUS refused to meet the SFSU to even consider negotiating wage levels, and this made it considerably more difficult for the Union to co-ordinate any collective action⁶. In fact, throughout the 1930s collective action was absent in East Lothian, despite the continued union presence within the county⁷.

In Dumfriesshire it was only with state intervention that any collective action occurred with reference to labour matters. The establishment of the District Wage Committees under the Corn Production Act in 1917/18, forced the election of worker representatives⁸. Dumfries and Galloway was the only area in lowland Scotland whose farm wages were markedly affected by the decisions of the district committees⁹. No further effort at collective bargaining

¹ Interview Raeburn, Main, Denholm.

² It seems reasonable to assume that the Union would have communicated this information. On the strike in Norfolk see Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, ch.8.

³ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 7 March 1924, 27 February 1925; *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1925, p.6.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, April 1927, p.230; *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 4 - 18 March 1927.

⁵ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 7 and 14 March 1930; *Scottish Farm Servant*, March 1930, p.240, April 1930, p.20.

⁶ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 27 February 1931; *Scottish Farm Servant*, March 1931, p.240.

⁷ None of the interviewees, most of whom acknowledged a noticeable union presence, mentioned any attempts at collective action after the 1920s.

⁸ *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 19 December 1917.

⁹ See chapter 3. A farmer from Thornhill was the first to be prosecuted under the Corn Production Act minimum wage provisions; *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 29 November 1919. For the actual level of wages in Dumfriesshire at this time see Wilson, J., 'Agricultural

was made until 1935, when Dumfries NFUS was one of the areas that rejected the national collective bargaining scheme proposed by the SFSU¹. When minimum wage regulation was introduced in 1937, Dumfriesshire was the first county in the south of Scotland where a prosecution took place². The District Agricultural Wage Committee, formed under the 1937 Act for Dumfries and Galloway, appears to have operated relatively smoothly, but on at least one occasion (and unlike East Lothian) the workers' representatives failed to vote as a collective body³.

Voluntary collective action, therefore, was non-existent in Dumfriesshire; and in East Lothian (the SFSU's strongest county) was only partially successful in the 1920s. Agricultural trade unionism has generally remained weak, both chronologically and geographically, and many of the general problems faced by the SFSU were experienced by other farm worker unions.

'...in farm work we have a multitude of employers each employing a few men. In most other industries large bodies of men are employed by a few employers. In farming the workers have to make bargains for themselves; in most other employments the conditions are settled by a few employers and one bargain may cover 1000 workmen. This means that it is more difficult to secure the necessary argument between all the workers who have to make bargains. There is also the further complication that the worker has not merely to secure a job but has to get a house from his employer as well. Then it is only once a year that this opportunity arises, and the workers have only that period at which to sell their labour and find a house. These things have all to be considered, and must be considered, when farm workers in Scotland make up their minds to endeavour to agree as to the price at which they will sell their labour, and the conditions under which they will agree to work.'⁴

Further problems included the high occupational migration rates of workers in their twenties, the scattered dispersion of the workforce, and the high job turnover rates of farm servants⁵. Newby identified close personal contact

wages in Dumfries and Galloway district' *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, 3 (1920), pp.329-334.

¹ *Scottish Farmer*, 10 August 1935, p.1132; see chapter 4.

² *Scottish Farmer*, 18 February 19139, p.247; *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 15 February 1939.

³ SRO, AF 59/115, *Minutes of agricultural wages committee. District no. 8 (Dumfries, Kirkcudbright and Wigtown, 1937-68*, 3 February 1938.

⁴ *Scottish Farm Servant*, October 1919, p.91.

⁵ SFSU branch circular, 30 June 1926. Duncan, the General Secretary, wrote a number of papers on the problems of organisation; Duncan, J.F., 'The organisation of wage earners in

between farmer and worker as a major obstacle to trade unionism¹. However, the case for such an argument is not so powerful in this situation, given the less intimate work relations that were enjoyed on Scottish farms in the early part of the twentieth century, and the high mobility rates of workers. The success in East Lothian was clearly related to the larger farm size, and the experience of large workforces on sizeable arable farms where direct labour supervision was not undertaken by the farmer². East Lothian also had a strong mining community, and therefore many of the farm workers were made aware of the possible impact of collective action. Nevertheless, when successful collective action occurred, it was limited chronologically to the latter part of the First World War and the 1920s, a pattern similar to that experienced in other parts of Britain³. Certainly the war had a critical role to play in motivating the workers into collective action, given the economic and financial fluctuations of the time and the general rise in trade unionism. However, the continuing ability of the SFSU to exert some collective power over wage bargaining in the 1920s, particularly after 1923, was not matched by other British agricultural trade unions, but its strength, even in East Lothian, should not be over-stressed. A number of interviewees who were union members never went to any meetings, and a general complaint was that the farm servants were too independently-minded to act effectively as a group⁴.

'It was a very uphill job with the Union, because the workers wouldn't co-operate....Farm workers were awfully jealous of each other.'⁵

As noted earlier, some historians consider that the nature of agricultural production produced endemic conflict within the workplace. Howkins, in particular, has argued that the fluctuating seasonal demand for labour and the consequential renegotiation of wages were an important cause⁶. In Scotland any seasonal variations in pay for the regular workers were

agriculture' *Proceedings of the second international conference of agricultural economists* (George Banta, Menasha, Wisconsin, 1930), pp.449-458; 'Organising farm workers' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 4 (1936), pp.250-258.

¹ Newby, H., *The deferential worker*, pp.414 and 430.

² Newby found a partial link between unionisation and workforce size; *ibid*, pp.259-260.

³ Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, chs.6-9; Pretty, D.A., *The rural revolt that failed*, chs.4-6; Howell, D.W., 'Labour organization among agricultural workers in Wales, 1872-1921' *Welsh History Review*, 16 (1992), pp.73-92.

⁴ Interview Douglas and Trotter.

⁵ Interview Denholm.

⁶ Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men*, ch.2.

excluded through the use of fixed, long-term contracts, and conflict was therefore not affected by the seasonality of production¹.

¹ See chapter 6.

Conclusion: the nature of employment relations

Returning to Newby, what evidence is there for deferential interaction on Scottish farms in the early part of the twentieth century? The answer, quite simply, is very little.

The work, social and market situations of Scottish farm servants resulted in employees and employers combining an acceptance of the legitimacy of the employment contract, with social independence. Workers did not question the economic position of the farmers as employers; even at the height of collective activity in East Lothian in 1923 they accepted that the labour contract enabled employers (or their intermediaries) to exercise authority within the workplace. However, neither did the workers regard a farmer as a socially superior individual, one with whom interaction was to be of deferential nature. In addition, for the majority of the period under investigation (and a substantial number of years prior to 1900), Scottish farm workers were not in a position of market dependence or powerlessness; socially-unacceptable behaviour would bring about a problematic 'reputation' for the individual, but this was a position that employers faced as well. The changed market circumstances of the 1930s did not bring about any radical alteration in these beliefs, simply because the long-term nature of previous market situations had engrained certain values on Scottish rural communities. Particularly noticeable is the fact that employers were never expected to act paternalistically. In other words, they did not offer benefits to the workers (either financial or social) in return for legitimising a superior social position which could then be utilised to the employer's benefit in contractual employment relations¹.

On the other hand, a number of factors prevented farm workers from establishing a definite class consciousness and acting effectively as a collective group. Firstly, although the primary basis of the 'community' for the farm servants was an 'occupational' one, the focus of attention and status was interactional, i.e. the 'best' people were those who undertook work in the most skilful manner. Secondly, farm workers accepted the attributional position of farmers as employers and controllers of the means of production, but this application of status to farmers was in an economic sense only.

¹ For Newby paternalism and the 'gentlemanly ethic' were the major methods used in the maintenance of the deferential dialectic within the British class structure; 'The deferential dialectic', pp.151-163.

Finally, the existence of specialisations and hierarchies on the farm generally meant that, in a given situation, the workforce could be divided on the nature and level of their relationship with the employer. The grieve, especially, was in a half-way position, caught between the interests of employer and labour. He was not a permanent spokesman or representative of the workforce, and was as likely to be supportive of the farmer as of a particular group of workers. Specialisations within the workforce led stock workers (shepherds, dairymen and sometimes cattlemen) to form different relationships with the employer, more independent in the workplace with greater responsibility and more equal interaction. Amongst horsemen, and to a certain extent women, the stress on hierarchy further promoted the allocation of status on an interactional basis, which in itself reduced the potential for conflict.

When disputes did occur, they were uncommon, small-scale and local (usually farm-based), and concerned re-establishing the economic and social position of employer or worker, if either felt the need to do so. Rarely were disputes taken any further than a heated exchange and an implicit compromise. However, in extreme circumstances the balance of power was in the employer's favour, given his control of housing and the general acceptance of the legitimacy of his authority.

Collective views and behaviour were more likely to occur on large farms, in arable areas, where the concentration of workers at a particular location, plus the reduced role of face-to-face employment relations, meant that some element of collective feeling as a particular class could occur. Nevertheless, the development of class consciousness amongst Scottish farm servants required certain economic and social circumstances, specifically the dislocation caused by the First World War. This produced the rapid development of trade unionism in some areas, and the potential for substantial collective conflict and action during the 1920s, but such a pattern did not continue into the 1930s. Part of the reason lies in the circumstances of farmers, who had experienced substantial financial returns during the period 1914-20, in which the workers had not generally shared¹. By the early 1930s the position of farmers was much weaker, and the market situation had turned against the farm workers, therefore the potential gains to be made from collective action were very limited.

¹ See chapters 2-3.

Overall, then, the image of society that workers in both East Lothian and Dumfriesshire conformed to can best be described as 'independent traditionalism'. Their focus was on the immediate locality (their own occupational community)¹, and while they accepted their economic position as employees, they did not regard themselves as socially inferior. There were expectations of behaviour on both sides, but these related generally to work itself, and not to the broader community. The real social divide in rural lowland Scotland remained between the tenant farmer and the landowner².

¹ For a contemporary commentary on this see, Ashby, A.W., 'Some human and social factors in the depression' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 1 (1929), pp.89-99.

² On landownership in south-west Scotland see Campbell, R.H., *Owners and occupiers: changes in rural society in south-west Scotland before 1914* (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen, 1991), ch.7; and Scotland generally, Callander, R.F., *A pattern of landownership in Scotland* (Haughend, Finzean, 1987), ch.6. The present position of landowners in the Borders, with some historical background, is examined in Morris, A., 'Patrimony and power: a study of lairds and landownership in the Scottish Borders' (PhD, Edinburgh University, 1989). In 1939 70% of holdings in Dumfriesshire and 78% in East Lothian were still occupied by tenant farmers.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The market for farm labour in Scotland, 1900-1939

The focus for the thesis has been an examination of the market for regular farm labour in lowland Scotland during the period 1900-1939; an analysis which has looked at a wide range of issues and utilised a variety of different sources and methodologies. In doing so, it has provided a valuable contribution to Scottish historiography by describing the patterns of economic and social change in an industry that has received little academic attention. In addition, it has exploited recent theories of sociology and economics to develop a structural basis for the microeconomic analysis of the behaviour of individuals in rural societies; structures which have been conspicuous by their absence in previous work on rural/agricultural history.

An examination of the patterns of change within, and the financial condition of, Scottish agriculture produced general results which corroborate what is already known about the situation of farming in other parts of Britain during the early part of the twentieth century¹. Over the long run, the structure and nature of production was remarkably stable, particularly in comparison with the massive changes experienced during the 1940s². Scottish agriculture was conditioned by physical factors and the economics of food supply into concentrating on livestock products. Overall, the whole period saw a gradual shift towards increased acreages of permanent grass and rough grazing, and a rise in livestock densities. This was achieved through the marginal manipulation of complex rotations, whose basic structure was already in place in 1900. The First World War did mark, as Dewey has demonstrated, a temporary dislocation in the pre- and post-war patterns. 1916-21 saw an increase in the proportion of land devoted to crops, and a decline in livestock numbers and yields; changes caused by state intervention and the disruption of international food markets. However, these influences were not permanent. The interwar period was one in which the growth of those

¹ Whetham, E.H., *The agrarian history of England and Wales, VIII, 1914-39* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978); Brown, J., *Agriculture in England: a survey of farming, 1870-1947* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987).

² Whitby, H., 'Some changes in the structure of Scottish agriculture since 1870' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 8 (1950), pp.333-334.

sectors naturally protected from foreign competition (dairy, fruit and vegetables, poultry) continued as it had done prior to 1914.

However, it would be incorrect to mark this period as one entirely devoid of change. New technologies emerged in the form of the tractor and the milking machine. The state developed a growing willingness to subsidise directly agricultural incomes, especially during the 1930s. There was a gradual shift by farmers towards owner-occupancy.

Financially, the early part of the twentieth century was a period of swings and roundabouts for farmers, depending on their individual circumstances. During the first two decades of the century, most farmers earned a reasonable return for their efforts, with the First World War being particularly profitable. The 1920s and 1930s are years which are usually regarded as ones of general depression in agriculture. However, only during the early 1930s did farmers suffer badly, and the depression hit certain sectors more than others. Sheep and arable farmers bore the brunt of the price falls, while dairy producers remained consistently profitable. During the 1930s government assistance was highly skewed towards those farms with a high arable weighting in the south and east of Scotland.

The impact of changes in the twentieth-century economy on the agricultural labour market has previously received very limited attention, except for the war years¹. The work presented here demonstrates that the general stability in the nature of agricultural production, notwithstanding the changes mentioned above, resulted in a continual, unchanging demand for a regular, skilled labour force. Fluctuations in the demand for agricultural products showed up in variations in occupational wage differentials, but the overall demand for farm labour was remarkably stable.

External forces had a much greater role to play in the economics of the labour market. Throughout the nineteenth century, Scottish agriculture exported labour to urban areas and abroad; migration which was encouraged by the restricted supply of rural housing and the absence of rural welfare provision. The result was little unemployment, and rising agricultural wages were a feature of the latter part of the century². During the years 1900-1914, these factors remained broadly in place.

¹ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture in the First World War* (Routledge, London, 1989).

² Devine, T.M. (ed.), *Farm servants and labour in lowland Scotland 1770-1914* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1984), chs.1 and 13.

The First World War marked a period of disruption in previous labour flows, particularly emigration. However, the general requirement for labour in urban areas, plus the demands of the military, only accentuated the absence of any unemployment in the countryside. During the 1920s the pre-war system appeared to re-establish itself. Emigration soon recommenced, with Scotland now at the top of the European emigration league, and there was a continual demand for migrating workers from urban-based industries.

However, the depression of the early 1930s demonstrated the reliance of the Scottish agricultural labour market on external labour demand. The industry had consistently exhibited a highly skewed age structure with a substantial proportion of workers leaving during their twenties and early thirties. The emergence of unemployment amongst farm workers was the result of the termination of external demand, as urban unemployment rose to very high levels and emigration collapsed. The depression in agriculture did result in some decline in the demand for labour, particularly in the years 1929-32 when the fall in prices ran ahead of wages. However, the decline was limited by the drop in real wages from 1932 to 1936.

The fundamental change within the labour market was further demonstrated by the altered pattern of institutional intervention. Labour issues were forced onto the policy agenda by the disruption and demands of the First World War. This enabled the Scottish Farm Servants' Union (SFSU) actively to pursue a programme of voluntary collective bargaining with the National Farmers' Union of Scotland (NFUS), a policy whose success grew with the membership of both bodies. Meanwhile, the state legislated for minimum wages on the basis of compulsory arbitration, intervention which proved to be completely ineffective in the face of the prevalent labour market conditions and the success of voluntary collective bargaining. The failure of these provisions reinforced the trade union view that the state should not attempt any statutory labour market regulation.

This attitude changed radically in the period 1929-35 in the face of the collapse of the old labour market structure, the appearance of unemployment amongst farm workers, and the failure of various collective bargaining schemes. The result was renewed state intervention during the late 1930s, regulating wages, holidays and unemployment payments. The experience of wage regulation was very different from that of 1917-21, with real wages rising and employment falling. The success of the SFSU in persuading Conservative governments to adopt such proposals was a

tribute to its strength of organisation and leadership, and its orthodox attitude towards labour relations. On the other hand the NFUS remained a weak organisation, where the central officials found it difficult to control or influence the membership. However, the state intervened primarily on the basis of precedent, the introduction of unemployment insurance to the vast majority of workers in 1921, and of minimum wages in English and Welsh agriculture in 1924. In fact, on certain welfare issues, such as housing, health insurance and holidays with pay, legislation and intervention were driven by the perceived requirements of the wider community rather than specific demands from agricultural interest groups.

In general, Scottish agricultural institutions found it difficult to locate themselves within the emerging agricultural policy community, which was located around Whitehall and Parliament¹. This was particularly true for the NFUS and the Department of Agriculture for Scotland, which lacked the size and political clout of their English counterparts (the National Farmers' Union and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries)².

Many of the macroeconomic patterns outlined above were not experienced by farmworkers in other parts of Britain, particularly the southern half. Farm workers in the south of England were not subjected to sustained industrial demand for labour and high rates of emigration during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Differences in the nature of agricultural production meant that Scottish farm workers were, on average, more highly-skilled, better paid and enjoyed much greater regularity of employment. These conditions remained in place until the end of the 1920s, and therefore shaped institutional policy accordingly. By the time the market situation had substantially altered, the lack of state regulation meant that Scottish farm workers were hit harder by wage rate falls during the mid 1930s. This position forced a reassessment of policy, resulting in unprecedented intervention in the Scottish agricultural labour market, so that by 1939 its regulatory framework was very similar to that of England and Wales.

¹ Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy, 1912-36: a study in Conservative politics* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989); Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support in Britain: the development of the agricultural policy community* (Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1990).

² Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*; Cox, G., Lowe, P. and Winter, M., 'The origins and development of the National Farmers' Union' *Agricultural History Review*, 39 (1991), pp.30-47.

Such a radical alteration, however, did not occur in the microeconomic operation of the labour market. Detailed examination of the specific behaviour of individuals alongside an analysis of the broad macroeconomic patterns is not an approach that has usually been adopted by economic historians, whether they are studying farm workers or the labour market more generally. Neither has the adoption of specific theoretical structures in order to provide a basis for analysis been a feature of rural historical literature. A number of topics were selected for study on the basis of their theoretical interest to economists and sociologists, and of the significance attached to them by contemporary commentators and agricultural historians. These were, the methods of signalling and screening adopted by employers and workers during the recruitment process, the nature and enforcement of contractual arrangements, the patterns of and factors influencing worker mobility, and worker-employer relations.

With reference to recruitment, labour economists have for some time identified the importance of signalling and screening in ensuring the efficient operation of the labour market; a belief most clearly elucidated in the theory of job search. The key to the efficient operation of recruitment mechanisms is the provision of information concerning the attributes of employers and employees. The more accurate and easily obtainable information is, the greater the chance of an effective match between employer requirements and worker skills. Evidence presented in chapter 6 establishes that market information was readily available to both sides in the Scottish agricultural labour market throughout the period in question. This was achieved through a number of mechanisms, hiring fairs, newspapers and local contacts. The decline of the hiring fair and its replacement by the newspaper was a product of changing social requirements away from large, open markets, and the introduction of new transport and communication technologies, the bicycle and the telephone. It did not signal the end of farm service and long-term contracts, as has been suggested for the north of England¹.

The efficient provision of information also ensured the continued operation of the long-term contract. The labour contract consisted of explicit and implicit conditions. Explicit conditions could be enforced through the courts, but the legal actions were rarely resorted to. Labour economists have puzzled over the existence of implicit contracts and their enforcement.

¹ Caunce, S., *Amongst farm horses: the horselads of East Yorkshire* (Alan Sutton, Stroud, 1991), ch.17.

Scottish farmers and farm workers used well-established implicit contracts controlled through reputations. A person breaking the implicit contract would obtain a 'bad' reputation and become discriminated against in future market dealings. These implicit conditions were socially constructed, and therefore sometimes open to reinterpretation, as shown by the decline of sick pay.

An important part of the contractual and recruitment systems was the practice of worker mobility. Scottish farm workers only stayed with their employers for an average of three years. High rates of mobility are a feature traditionally associated with the existence of farm service and long contracts¹. Yet systematic measurement and analysis have been lacking, one academic describing the patterns of movement as 'ambiguous'². Worker mobility is an issue that has attracted attention from labour economists, given the importance of inter-firm flows of labour in the operation of the labour market. Previously there has been little effort to co-ordinate the historical evidence with theoretical understanding.

Statistical analysis of the movement of Scottish farm servants produced a number of interesting results. There was a link between the state of the economy and levels of mobility. Workers were more likely to move when unemployment was low and vacancies high, confirming the pattern identified by Southall for tramping artisans during the nineteenth century³. The position taken by labour economists is further enhanced by evidence that there was a strong relationship between skill and responsibility and mobility rates. Those employees who had greater employment status (shepherds and grieves) remained on individual farms for longer.

As far as employer attributes were concerned, there was no correlation between farm size and rates of employee turnover; a finding in contrast to the predictions of economists and the empirical data for agricultural workers produced in the early 1970s⁴. In fact, qualitative evidence suggests that the

¹ Kussmaul, A., *Servants in husbandry in early modern England* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981), chs. 2 and 4; Houston, R.A., 'Frequent flitting: geographical mobility and social structure in mid-nineteenth-century Greenlaw' *Scottish Studies*, 27 (1983), pp.31-47; Caunce, S. *Amongst farm horses*, ch.3.

² Kussmaul, A., 'The ambiguous mobility of farm servants' *Economic History Review*, 34 (1981), pp.222-235.

³ Southall, H., 'The tramping artisan revisits: labour mobility and economic distress in early Victorian England' *Economic History Review*, 44 (1991), pp.272-296.

⁴ National Economic Development Office, *Agricultural manpower in England and Wales* (HMSO, London, 1972), pp.67-69; Gasson, R., 'Turnover and size of labour force on farms' *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 25 (1974), pp.115-127; Ehrenberg, R.G. and Smith, R.S., *Modern labor economics: theory and public policy* (Scott, Foresman and Co., Glenview, Illinois, 1988), pp.369-370.

most important factor in determining rates of mobility across individual farms was the reputation of the farm/farmer in relation to the implicit contract. Therefore, once again, reputations and the accurate flow of information provide the key to understanding the microeconomic operation of the Scottish agricultural labour market.

A similar approach combining empirical material within a theoretical structure also bears significant fruit in the study of employer-worker relations. This is an area which has received considerable historical attention, yet attempts to theorise its condition have been limited¹. Rural sociologists have a well-developed theory of rural employment relationships in the work of Newby. He stressed not just the situation faced by the employer and employee within the workplace, but also within the overall labour market and the wider social context.

Some historians of agricultural employment relations in other parts of Britain have come to regard worker-employer relations as relatively antagonistic, with any signs of worker deference only hiding an embittered, confrontational attitude². For Scottish agriculture it has been demonstrated, through both contemporary accounts and oral evidence, that workers and farmers enjoyed relatively stable employment relations. This stability was based on a mutual acceptance of the legitimacy of the employment contract and the position of the farmer as employer, without any accompanying social deference on the part of the worker. Farmers and workers did form separate occupational communities, but divisions on the basis of occupation and position within the labour hierarchy prevented workers from identifying themselves as a single, homogeneous group. The awarding of status within both communities was on an interactional rather than an attributional basis.

Certain circumstances did result in some collective organisation amongst farm workers, as in the case of East Lothian. Large farms with sizeable workforces made organisation easier, as did the accompanying separation of employer and worker at the place of employment. The trigger was

¹ Carter, I., *Farmlife in northeast Scotland 1840-1914: the poor man's country* (John Donald, Edinburgh, 1979); Howkins, A., *Poor labouring men: rural radicalism in Norfolk 1870-1923* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985); Caunce, S. *Amongst farm horses*; Snell, K.D.M., 'Deferential bitterness: the social outlook of the rural proletariat in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and Wales' in M.L.Bush (ed.), *Social orders and social classes in Europe since 1500: studies in social stratification* (Longman, London, 1992), pp.158-184.

² Howkins, A., 'Structural conflict and the farmworker: Norfolk, 1900-1920' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 4 (1977), pp.217-229; Pretty, D.A. *The rural revolt that failed: farm workers' trade unions in Wales 1889-1950* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1989), introduction and ch.1; Snell, K.D.M., 'Deferential bitterness'.

provided by the First World War, the temporary dislocation of the labour market, rapid price inflation, the sudden rise in farmer incomes, and the general growth of collective activity throughout the country. Under such influences unionisation flourished. However, its success was rapidly eroded once these conditions disappeared, and individual employer-worker relations generally remained on a stable basis throughout the period 1900-39.

This microeconomic examination of the Scottish agricultural labour market is exactly what the new rural social history has been lacking, a strong theoretical structure combined with detailed empirical research. The macroeconomic position of farm labour received a major shock during the 1930s, but it was not deep or sustained enough to have an impact on well-established patterns of individual behaviour within the locality. It took the major interventions associated with the Second World War, the statutory ending of long-term contracts and limitations on worker mobility, to radically alter the position at the microeconomic level. The behaviour of individuals within the local labour market remained heavily circumscribed by the custom and tradition¹, and the basic systems of labour market operation were not threatened. The long-term contract, with its specific termination dates and associated high mobility rates, continued to satisfy the requirements of both farmers and workers; a system that was underpinned by the general stability of employment relations. If anything, it was the dislocation of the First World War that threatened to precipitate widespread collective action. The conclusion, therefore, is quite simply that macroeconomic change did not automatically result in altered conditions or structures for individual labour market behaviour.

¹ On custom in the agricultural labour market see Ashby, A.W., 'Some human and social factors in the depression' *Journal of the Proceedings of the Agricultural Economics Society*, 1 (1929), pp.89-90.

A future agenda

In 1979, a future agenda for both Scottish history and rural studies was laid out by Ian Carter¹. At the time, Carter berated Edinburgh University historians for misrepresenting the patterns of economic and social development within rural Scotland. It is therefore fitting that the present work has emerged from Edinburgh, proving that it was the persons, rather than the place, who were at fault.

It was impossible for this thesis to fill the huge gaps in the historiography of rural Scotland. The research only concentrated on one section of the occupational population in one industry. There is still so much about which so little is known. Agriculture itself requires further study, for example, on the financial condition of the industry, the nature of production, the structure of landholding, and the position of farmers, landowners, casual workers, and the role of women². However, farming was not the only significant employer of labour in rural areas. There is little historical literature on non-agricultural rural industries and services in the twentieth century. Examples include, transport, forestry, distilling, retailing, mining and quarrying, pubs and hotels, domestic service, etc. Similarly, many of the bodies which had a major impact on individual life have no recorded history - the Scottish Landowners Federation, the Scottish Women's Rural Institute, the Forestry Commission, the Milk Marketing Boards, plus a range of welfare and leisure services.

In geographical terms, much of the present study was limited to Dumfriesshire and East Lothian. It would be a mistake automatically to transport the conclusions to other areas, where socio-economic structures and cultural traditions may have been different. Much work within rural localities remains to be done, particularly covering the modern regions of Borders, Central, Fife and Tayside. Grampian requires a rural history beyond 1914, and a reassessment of Carter's Marxian analysis of nineteenth century social relations would be a welcome addition.

Compared with earlier periods, the agricultural/rural historiography of twentieth-century Britain remains weak³. The thesis has filled some of the gaps for the 1900-1939 period with reference to the labour market, but the

¹ Carter, I, *Farmlife in northeast Scotland*, pp.178-184.

² Literature on women is also lacking for England; Howkins, A., *Reshaping rural England: a social history 1850-1925* (HarperCollins, London, 1991), pp.295-296.

³ Mingay, G., 'British rural history: themes in agricultural history and rural social history' in P.Lowe and M.Bodiguel (eds.), *Rural studies in Britain and France* (Belhaven, London, 1990), pp.85-87.

absence of work on the Second World War and post-war years is scandalous¹. The twentieth century has been a period of major change both for agriculture as an industry and for rural regions in general. The only topic that has received anything close to an adequate coverage being policy and institutional development². One can hope that the systematic analysis provided by Dewey for the First World War provides a stimulus for further work³.

As noted above, the historical examination of rural societies and industries would benefit considerably from a more interdisciplinary approach, notably the adoption of the structures provided by social science theory. In this particular case, the focus was upon the sociology of social-stratification in employment and the economics of labour market operations. However, the possibilities could easily expand into other subject areas, for example political theory and social anthropology⁴.

Such frameworks would not only benefit the new areas into which rural social historians have been moving, but also wider historical analysis. Of course economic and social history has always been heavily influenced by the theoretical approaches supplied by other academic disciplines. However, there is a danger in getting caught up in one particular body of theory to the detriment of general academic development. The strength of good social science history remains the ability to utilise various approaches and methodologies in analysing chronological trends, while at the same time remaining securely embedded in detailed historical material.

¹ The major exception is the survey undertaken by Holderness; Holderness, B.A., *British agriculture since 1945* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985).

² Self, P. and Storing, H.J., *The state and the farmer* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1962); Cooper, A.F., *British agricultural policy*; Tracy, M., *Government and agriculture in Western Europe 1880-1988* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1989); Smith, M.J., *The politics of agricultural support*.

³ Dewey, P.E., *British agriculture*.

⁴ On the use of political theory in the study of organised farm labour see Danziger, R., *Political powerlessness: agricultural workers in post-war England* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988), ch.1. Howkins has suggested very recently that more use should be made of social anthropology; Howkins, A., *Reshaping rural England*, pp.1 and 296.

Appendix 1: Agricultural prices

The detailed sources on which the agricultural prices for the periods 1900-14 and 1914-21 are based are provided below. They are taken from the annual *Agricultural Statistics* for Scotland, which were published in Parliamentary Papers up to 1921, and then as official publications from 1921 onwards¹.

1900-14:

Barley: Edinburgh prices

Oats: Edinburgh prices

Fat Cattle: average prices in Scotland (live weight)

Fat Sheep: first quality Cheviots

Milk: 1907, price on railway station platform (September-October);
1908-11, wholesale price to retailers; 1913-14, average prices

Wool: average prices of White Cheviot wool

1914-21:

Barley: 1911-13, Edinburgh prices; 1914-21 Scottish prices

Oats: 1911-13, Edinburgh prices; 1914-21 Scottish prices

Fat Cattle: First quality Aberdeen Angus

Fat Sheep: First quality Cheviots

Milk: Glasgow wholesale prices

Wool: Cheviot Hogg Unwashed, July prices; 1914-16, Border prices,
government fixed maximum

Potatoes: Langworthy varieties on Red soils; 1911-12, British prices
were used to calculate the base index in the absence of separate
Scottish data (in 1913 the English price was 101s. per ton, the
Scottish price was 107s. 9d.)

England & Wales: Agricultural price index (Ministry of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Food/Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for
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(HMSO, London, 1968), p.85)

¹ For the full references see bibliography

Appendix 2

Grouping of occupations from the 1921 Census

a) Males

<u>Group</u>	<u>1921 classification¹</u>
Farmers & relatives assisting	Land & estate managers, Farmers, Farmers' relatives assisting
Farmworkers	Farm bailiffs, grieves & foremen, Shepherds, Agricultural labourers & farm servants
Other agricultural workers	Gardeners & nurserymen, Agricultural pupils, Foresters, Agricultural machine proprietors, foremen & operators, Drainage supervisors & workers, estate labourers, crofters & families, fruit pickers, other agricultural occupations
Domestic service	Persons engaged in personal service
Mining & quarrying	Mining & quarrying, Treatment of non-metalliferous mine & quarry products
Building, wood, stone & glass	Bricks, pottery & glass, Wood & furniture, Paper makers & printers, Builders, bricklayers & stone workers, Painters & decorators
Dress (including textiles)	Leather & skin products, Textile workers, Clothing makers
Transport	Transport & communication, Warehousemen, storekeepers & packers

¹ For the 1921 occupational classification listing see *Report of the thirteenth decennial census of Scotland, III, occupations and industries* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1924), pp.1-3

Food & drink	Food, drink & tobacco manufacturers
Metals	Metal workers (incl. precious metals & electro-plate)
Professionals & commercial	Commercial, finance & insurance, Public administration, Professionals, Clerks & draughtsmen
Others	All other occupations

b) Females

Women were placed in the groups - Farmworkers, Domestic service, Dress (incl. textiles), Professional & commercial - as above. All other groupings were placed in the 'Others' category because of the small numbers involved.

Appendix 3

Details of interviewees

a) Workers

<u>County of work before 1939</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Year of birth</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Occupation</u>
Dumfries	Barber, John	c.1905	M	Ploughman
Dumfries	Bell, Tom	1917	M	Ploughman
Dumfries	Clark, James	1919	M	Pigman
Dumfries	Hunter, George	1924	M	Ploughman
Dumfries	Jardine, James	1924	M	General worker
Dumfries/ Kirkcudbright	McIntyre, William	1923	M	Dairyman
Dumfries	Maxwell, Mr.	1910	M	Shepherd
Dumfries/ Kirkcudbright	Saunders, James	c.1920	M	Ploughman
Dumfries	Scott, James	1914	M	Ploughman
Dumfries	Sykes, James	1912	M	Shepherd
East Lothian	Denholm, R.	1917	M	Ploughman
Midlothian	Douglas, J.	1921	M	Ploughman
East Lothian	Foggo, A.	1921	M	Tractorman
East/Midlothian	Hamilton, Alan	1904	M	Ploughman
Borders/ Midlothian	Heard, J.C.	1902	M	Shepherd
East Lothian/ Berwickshire	Lawrie, Charles	1913	M	Shepherd
East Lothian	Leckie, James	c.1919	M	Ploughman
East Lothian	Main, Charles	1909	M	Tractorman
East Lothian	Main, Mrs.	1912	F	Fieldworker
East Lothian	Porteus, Tom	c.1911	M	Ploughman
East Lothian	Raeburn, Jessie	1904	F	Fieldworker
East Lothian	Smart, Archie	1916	M	Ploughman
Borders	Trotter, John	1902	M	Ploughman
East Lothian	Waite, Annie	1898	F	Fieldworker

b) Farmers

<u>County</u>	<u>Name(Date of birth)</u>	<u>Name of farm (Parish)</u>	<u>Type*</u>
Dumfries	Gass, J.I. (1910)	Townhead (Mouswald)	Dairy/Cattle
Dumfries	Hastings, Robert (1921)	Rosehill (Holywood)	Dairy
Kirkcudbright	Maxwell, John (1910)	Garroch (Troqueer) ^a	Cattle/Sheep
East Lothian/ Berwickshire	Black, Mr. (1909)	Coates (Gladsmuir)	Arable/Stock
East Lothian	Drysdale, W.P. (1906)	Mainshill (Morham)	Arable/Stock
East Lothian	Forrest, Adam (1898)	Rockville/Balgone Barns (North Berwick)	Arable/Stock
East Lothian/ Perthshire	Graham, Mr. (c.1911)	Queenstonbank (Dirleton)	Arable/Stock
Midlothian	Matthewson, A. (1918)	Soutra (Fala & Soutra) ^a	Hill sheep
East Lothian	Wright, David (1905)	Heugh (North Berwick)	Dairy/Poultry

* 'Stock' indicates that the farms were feeding sheep and cattle.

^a These two farms were technically outside Dumfries and East Lothian.

However, the two parishes where they were located border onto the counties under examination; Troqueer is just to the west of Dumfries burgh, and Fala is on the south-western edge of East Lothian adjacent to the parish of Humbie.

All the farmers were male.

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